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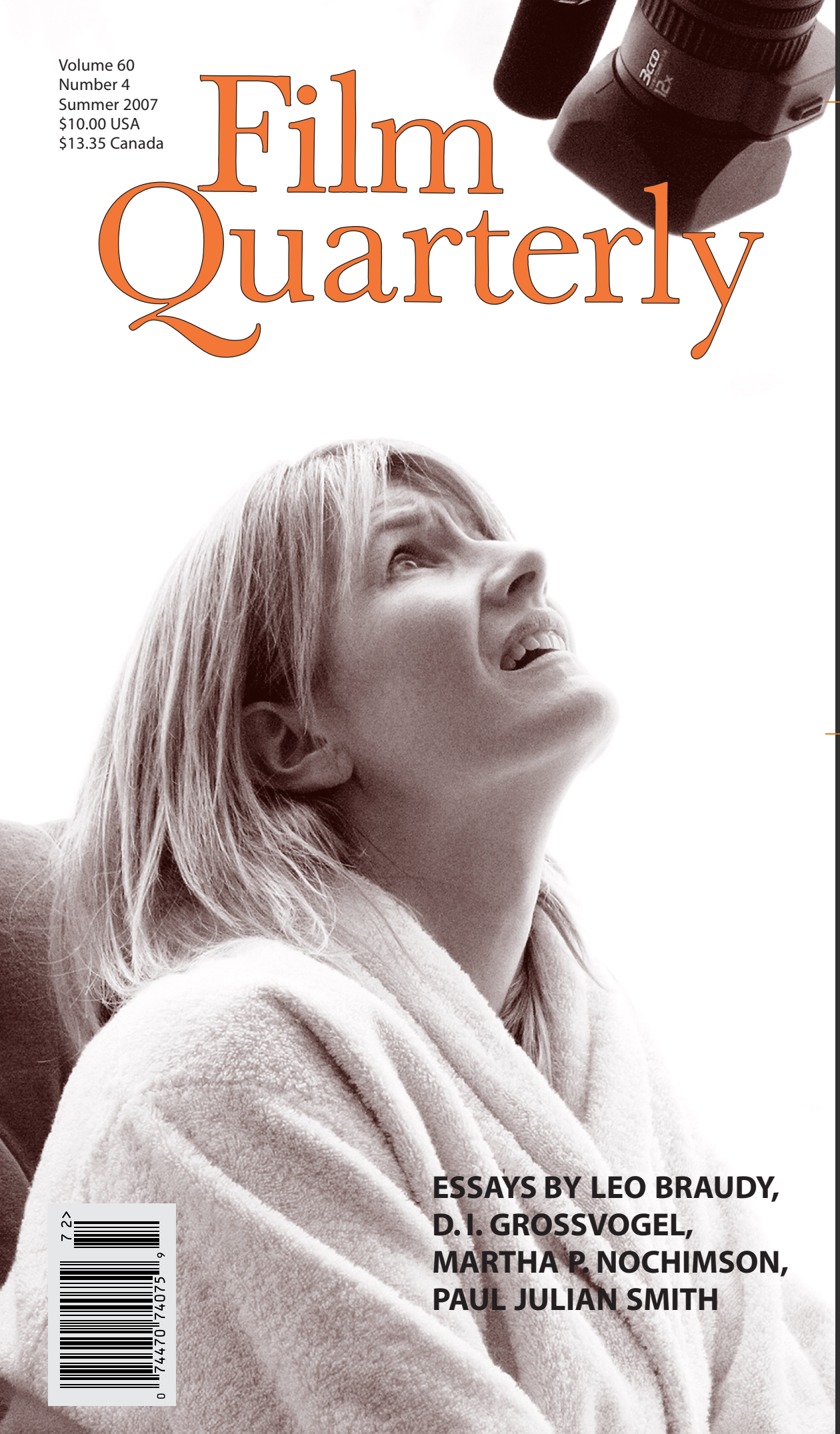

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■ EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

Tuning Up

WRITING IN THE SPRING ISSUE, Jonathan Rosenbaum referred to a process whereby film culture, after a 1960s consensus, "splintered into academia and journalism, which often lamentably functioned as mutually indifferent or sometimes even mutually hostile institutions" (*FQ* 60, no. 3: 76). *Film Quarterly* has resisted this split by publishing writing of conviction and clarity, in the spirit of pluralism and open debate. But care is needed when taking a non-sectarian position. In particular it is risky to make for the middle ground—which, if it is gained, may prove to be parochial and something of a quagmire, offering no viable path between academic research and an outside world of serious lay enthusiasts. Continuing resistance to the fragmentation of film culture is better achieved in another way, by building coalitions of authors, approaches, and topics. Rallying diverse opinions is the key, so long as they have in common expertise, curiosity, forcefulness, precision in expressing ideas, and a sense of the specific qualities of what is being studied. On this basis a congregation of readers from different sections of the culture may be assembled.

But *Film Quarterly* is after all neither a political party nor a church (not even a non-sectarian one). Really the work is orchestral rather than ideological and it is as much a matter of practical organization as grand strategy.

During a recently concluded review of editorial policy, the concept of a wide-ranging group of timely essays (three thousand words or thereabouts, more substantial than most journalistic coverage but less exacting than a long-form academic paper) emerged as one crucial organizing idea. The outcome of the review will be evident in the fall, but the range and timeliness may already be seen in this issue. As well as essays on recent releases by Clint Eastwood, David Lynch, and Guillermo del Toro, a survey of Michael Haneke's work, a thoughtful interview with Oliver Stone, and the typically rewarding suite of book reviews that Matthew Bernstein has once more compiled, there are pieces about ethnographic documentary, one of U.S. TV's most distinctive interview shows, and two works of "machinima"—the intriguing hybrid of cinema and video games that is beginning to emerge from its subcultural Internet niche.

Certain themes recur. Writing about *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters of Iwo Jima*, Leo Braudy emphasizes the films' preoccupation with the ways "national myth ignores the human reality of war" (19). Although battle sequences are prominent, the prevailing mood is less epic than reflective and mournful; whatever vestigial idealism remains is tarnished by all the bloodshed. Much more playful and makeshift, the works Irene Chien discusses—*Deviation*, a machinima short, and the black-comic serial *Red vs. Blue*—are in the same vein. Their combatants are bitter or jaded in the manner (as she points out) of *M*A*S*H*. By contrast, *The Battle of Algiers,* Gillo Pontecorvo's account of insurrection and state-sponsored torture, which (as Mark Parker skillfully shows) continues to resonate, has a quality of idealistic outrage that might instructively be related to the blanker yet, in D. I. Grossvogel's compelling analysis, perhaps no less revolutionary-minded ending of Haneke's *Hidden*.

The permutations of valor, reluctance, and sadness in Eastwood's films are counterpointed by the post-Spanish Civil War nightmare of del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth.* Here there is unfailing courage in a young girl's defiance of her murderous Fascist stepfather. Taking a fantasy approach to his subject, del Toro, according to Paul Julian Smith, manages "to reinforce rather than reduce the horrors of history" (6). Aesthetically far apart, there is in this respect a paradoxical kinship between Eastwood's films and *Pan's Labyrinth*. All three have a tragic view of history and heroism. If an antidote to it were needed, it might be found in Lynch's *Inland Empire*, which Martha P. Nochimson persuasively reads as a fable of creative artistry—and one that ends not with heroic death but with an actress's "victory and pleasure" (14). Lynch's optimism offsets Eastwood's dismay but the two directors are recognizably dealing with comparable problems of individualism and freedom. Looking over the essays in this issue and the works they interpret, it is not finally a matter of any uniformity (and that is as it should be); but there are affinities and variations that provoke further thought.

ROB WHITE

Pan's Labyrinth (El laberinto del fauno)

Director, screenplay: Guillermo del Toro. Producers: Bertha Navarro, Alfonso Cuarón, Frida Torresblanco, Álvaro Augustin. Director of photography: Guillermo Navarro. Editor: Bernat Vilaplana. Music: Javier Navarrete. © 2006 Estudios Picasso, Tequila Gang, Esperanto Filmoj. U.S. distribution: Picturehouse Entertainment. DVD: New Line Home Video (U.S.), Optimum Home Entertainment (U.K.).

Two films recently coincided on the awards circuit. Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Babel* (2006) and Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* are both the product of transnational Mexican auteurs. But while the former is global in its ambitions (embracing ostentatiously diverse locations from California to Japan via Morocco), the latter is notably local in its scope (set in a precisely delimited place in the post-Civil War Spanish countryside). Moreover, as González Iñárritu's ambitions become more global, so the morals of his features become more banal. While *Amores perros* (2000) was a subtle and moving exploration of love and loss, precipitated by an all-too-believable car crash in Mexico City, *Babel* simply suggests the commonplace that communication is difficult among people of different cultures. *Babel* 's narrative is, furthermore, triggered by a random shooting that is insufficient foundation for the huge, unwieldy structure it is made to support.

With *Pan's Labyrinth*, however, writer–director Guillermo del Toro has built on his proven skills in fantasy (*Hellboy* in 2004) and Spanish history (*The Devil's Backbone* from 2001) to produce a work that is at once a logical development of his artistic trajectory and a wholly unexpected masterpiece from a director identified with such low-status genres as horror. Perfectly realized within its self-imposed limits of time and space, *Pan's Labyrinth* has wider implications for the key questions of nationality, gender, and identity than the bloated, star-studded excess of *Babel*. And in the technical perfection of its plotting, shooting, and cutting (not to mention its meticulous art design and expert animatronic and digital effects), it suggests a new model for world cinema production.

The trend for major directors to make films outside Mexico (Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* [2006] is also cited in this context) has of course been controversial. Mexican critics such as Gustavo García have decried a "Mexican cinema in exile." Del Toro himself, on the other hand, has spoken of film as "Esperanto," a universal language which, ironically, would seem to be one answer to the supposed problem of non-communication between cultures at which *Babel* gestures so showily. As we shall see, del Toro's practice is a valuable example of transnational cooperation. Eluding nativism (shooting "in exile"), he also avoids facile multiculturalism, engaging deeply with the culture, history, and cinema of his host country. When accepting several awards for *Pan's Labyrinth* at the Spanish Oscars or Goyas (where his feature was accepted without controversy as a "Spanish" film) he proclaimed: "¡Viva México y viva España!" This is no facile slogan. Rather it should be taken in the context of del Toro's vindication of the Spanish Civil War as an event of vital interest for the Mexico that welcomed so many exiles from the conflict. Far from reveling in *Babel*-style non-communication, *Pan's Labyrinth* reveals that, given sympathy and attention, films based on local events can have immediate and profound significance for global audiences.

Pan's Labyrinth begins with a blank, black screen. We hear the sound of feverish panting and the humming of Javier Navarrete's haunting theme. Titles briefly set the scene: it is Spain in 1944 and guerrillas are holding out in the woods against the triumphant Franco regime. In close-up we see the source of the labored breathing: as time runs backwards, a trickle of ruby-red blood retreats into the nostril of white-faced, black-haired Ofelia, the child protagonist played by extraordinary newcomer Ivana Baquero. Cinematographer Guillermo Navarro's camera, already restlessly mobile, plunges into her eye and the first fantasy sequence. The voiceover tells the ancient legend of a Princess, exiled from her underground realm, who will return to be with her father the King when she finds a portal to her lost home. The tiny figure of the Princess (Ofelia) descends the staircases of a vast fantasy set.

The screen flares up to white and the camera swoops over bombed buildings. A wide shot of a ruined bell tower shows the famously devastated village of Belchite, a drawing of which appeared on the cover of the Francoist magazine *Reconstrucción* as early as 1940. (The village, an uncanny tourist attraction, remains ruinous even today.) Ofelia and her sickly pregnant mother (the convincingly distressed Ariadna Gil) are traveling by official car (a Fascist symbol is prominently painted on its side) to a remote outpost. Here the girl will meet her repellent stepfather (Sergi López), a Francoist captain sent to fight the guerrillas. As mother Carmen stops the car to vomit by the road, daughter Ofelia comes face to face with a stele carved with a mysterious figure and replaces a piece of the carving she has found on the forest floor. She is rewarded with her first glimpse of this magical place's *genius loci*: a chattering stick insect she identifies as a "fairy." Soaring behind the

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Allusions to *The Spirit of the Beehive* (top left) and to Diego Velásquez, *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* (1618; bottom left), oil on canvas, National Gallery of Scotland

buzzing beast, the camera follows it and the car to the new family's fateful meeting at the decrepit mill that serves as the Francoist military headquarters.

What is clear from this opening sequence is an extraordinary fluidity of movement between fantasy and reality. While the plot is placed quite precisely in a historical moment with which few outside Spain are likely to be familiar (who knew that anti-Francoist resistance continued long after the Civil War ended?), the material effects of that desperate moment (the bloodied bodies of children) are juxtaposed with, are indeed inextricable from, the fantastic realms into which the imagination retreats when confronted by real-life horror.

Moreover there are very precise Spanish references here, and not just in the expert art design with its reference to a famously devastated village. Ofelia's mother scolds her daughter for reading fairy tales, telling her they will curdle her brain. It is a charge repeated throughout the film and one highly reminiscent of Spain's national narrative, *Don Quixote*, in which fantasy literature also transforms an outcast's experience of the mundane into the fantastic. It may be no accident that the film's principal location (built like all the sets to del Toro's precise specification) is a mill, albeit one deprived of the giant sails which gave rise to the knight's most famous exploit.

The replacing of the missing piece of the statue is a yet more precise reference. Spain's most famous art movie, Víctor Erice's *The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973), also set in the devastated countryside after the Civil War, confronts a dark-eyed girl (Ana Torrent) with nameless horrors. Ana faces not a faun but Frankenstein's monster, whom she has seen in a makeshift village cinema. One typically unsettling sequence has Ana, in her schoolroom, replace a missing part in a human manikin. As in the case of Ofelia, her distant sister in Spanish cinema, the missing piece is the eyes. Del Toro thus not only replays Spanish history in a Mexican mode he has perfected elsewhere; he also

Courtesy of Optimum Home Entertainment. © 2006 Estudios Picasso, Tequila Gang, Esperanto Filmoj

Preliminary drawing of the mill

remakes Spanish cinema by transforming Erice's austere and minimalist drama with gorgeously crafted mise-en-scène and deliriously inventive camerawork.

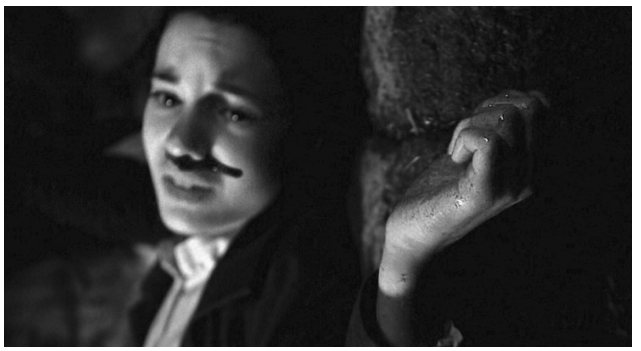
In spite of the frequent accusation that democratic Spain has turned its back on a traumatic history, wedded to a "pact of forgetting" between victors and vanquished, Spanish cinema since *The Spirit of the Beehive* has in fact frequently returned to the scene of Franco's crimes. Disturbingly, as those crimes have receded in time, the treatment has become progressively trivialized. Several films have shown the post-war period (known in Spain as the "years of hunger") through the eyes of improbably cute kids (as in *Secrets of the Heart* [1997] or *Butterfly's Tongue* [1999]). Others deploy retro wardrobe to turn the 1930s into expertly dressed sex comedy (the Oscar-winning *Belle Epoque* [1992]) or the 1940s into a sporting match between Fascists and guerrillas (the soccer-themed *The Goalkeeper* [2000]). Only del Toro, a supposed outsider, has managed to use the child-witness device, now so hackneyed, without a trace of sentimentality. And only he has been able to make use of an extraordinarily handsome mise-en-scène in such a way as to reinforce rather than reduce the horrors of history. In doing so he closely coincides with current trends in Spain, where a "Law of Memory" on the legacy of the Civil War has been bitterly debated and where mass war graves are only now being disinterred, a spectacle del Toro himself, master of the horror genre, might hesitate to depict.

When we move to the interiors of the mill, the main set, golden light slants over dark brown wooden furniture. Elderly women, overseen by steely housekeeper Mercedes (a Maribel Verdú unrecognizable from her role as the sexy wife in Cuarón's *And Your Mother Too* [2001]), chop root vegetables or gut rabbits. It is a scene and an aesthetic reminiscent of Velásquez (for example, *Old Woman Cooking Eggs* in the National Gallery of Scotland), which is frequently reproduced in Spanish period pictures. While local directors have often been content with this picturesque art design, del Toro combines it with more disturbing and ambitious non-naturalistic elements. As mother and daughter hug in their shadowy bedroom (the warm brown palette of day has shifted to the chilly blue of night), Ofelia tells her unborn brother the story of a miraculous flower that blooms every morning. In a single, extraordinary shot del Toro tilts down to inside the mother's womb, where we see a golden fetus mutely listening, and pans right to the fantastic blossom atop a mountain of thorns. Suddenly the stick insect, clicking and clucking, intrudes into the fantasy landscape and we follow it back to the bedroom where it transforms itself into the slightly sinister fairy of Ofelia's imagination.

In its stress on a world of women (of mothers, daughters, and housekeepers) wholly separate from that of men, *Pan's Labyrinth* is clearly commenting on gender relations. Captain Vidal, the stepfather, embodies a masculinity so exclusive it barely acknowledges the existence of the feminine. Welcoming his pregnant wife and stepdaughter to the mill he addresses them in the masculine plural form ("Bienvenidos") on the assumption that the unborn child, his true priority, is a boy. As he brutishly announces, a son must be born where his father is, even if this endangers the life of the mother; and, in childbirth, the mother must be sacrificed to ensure the survival of the son who will bear the father's name. His misogyny will prove his undoing: Mercedes, dismissed as "just a woman," is in league with the guerrillas and will conspire against her tyrannical master under his very nose.

Del Toro suggests that this fantasy of pure male filiation, without the intercession of women, is fundamental to Fascism. Vidal's fetishistic attention to uniform (black leather boots and gloves, sometimes clutching a girl's small white hand) and his amorous investment in the tools of torture ("With this," he gloats, "we will become intimate") suggest a fatal narcissism which is as much libidinal as it is political. Vidal's scenes with housekeeper Mercedes have an icy erotic menace. And it is not just sex that is perverted here. In a time of terror, nature is decidedly unnatural: Ofelia describes her mother as being "sick with baby" (pregnancy will

HISTORY, HORROR, AND MAGIC IN *PAN'S LABYRINTH*



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Parallel to reality

prove a mortal burden); and the verdant landscape (shot in national parks in the region of Segovia) hides blasted trees and monstrous toads. There is no sense of the rich sensuality of nature embodied by the mythical Pan of the film's English title.

It is after Vidal's first act of shockingly graphic violence (the stabbing to death of a rabbit-hunter in the face) that del Toro cuts to Ofelia's first visit to the fantasy world and her meeting with the ancient, creaking Faun that gives the film its Spanish title, *El laberinto del fauno*. Del Toro is perhaps suggesting here that fantasy is somehow proportionate to or compensatory for the horror of the real. But Ofelia is not a witness to the stabbing. Indeed, although it is tempting to describe hers as the guiding point of view in the film, like Ana Torrent's character in *The Spirit of the Beehive*, there is a great deal that she does not see. There are, indeed, gaping holes in the plot where elements first presented as fantastic are later revealed to have empirical presence in the real. What is the source of the mandrake which Ofelia places beneath her mother's bed and the Captain later discovers, if it is not, as we are shown, given to her by the Faun? How does Ofelia escape a locked room armed only with the chalk that magically creates doors in the walls or floor? The fact that we experience no sense of discontinuity of perspective throughout *Pan's Labyrinth*, seduced by its expert plotting and pacing, is a tribute to del Toro's mastery of story and technique.

Typically del Toro uses effortless parallel montage to interweave narrative threads. Thus as Ofelia, a new Alice, sets out on the first task she has been set by the Faun (a muddy descent to the slimy toad deep under a tree), del Toro crosscuts to the Captain riding out with his men in pursuit of the guerrillas and, later, to a lavish dinner party (the guests' umbrellas open like small black bombs). Here the Captain announces to his guests: "I want my son to be born in a new clean Spain." The obsessive abjection of the fantasy world (Ofelia's snow-white skin is covered in slime and mucous, her shiny patent shoes and prim party dress caked in mud and drenched by rain) might be read as del Toro's critique of the equally obsessive hygiene of the real-life realm of Fascism.

Unsurprisingly, Ofelia is placed in a bath on her muddy return. Del Toro tilts down from the tub to show her descending the fantasy staircase to the Faun's lair, once more in a single shot. This technique of the masked cut is vital to the fluid texture of the film: the camera is always tracking behind tree trunks only to emerge unexpectedly in another place, another time. Sound bridges serve the same purpose. The Captain's traditional songs played on a wind-up gramophone (one, incongruous in this damp, dark Northern setting, is called "Gardens of Granada") are first sourced in his all-too-real bedroom but are held on to play over scenes set in Ofelia's fantasy chambers. The clucking of the fairy–stick insect is made to merge with the ticking of the Captain's stopwatch.

The intricate parallel plotting, by del Toro himself of course, heightens or tightens this tense and intense connection. Ofelia must retrieve a key from a viscous ball vomited by the toad, just as Mercedes must guard, in real life, a secret key to the storeroom. Or again, Ofelia gets hold of a fantasy dagger in her second trial, just as Mercedes keeps in her apron a knife with which she will slice open the Captain's cheek ("You're not the first pig I've gutted"). Sometimes fantasy anticipates reality: a bloody stain spreads on the pages of Ofelia's magical book, just as (in the next shot) her mother's nightdress is drenched with blood as she nearly suffers a miscarriage. But at others it runs parallel to reality: Ofelia places under her mother's bed a mandrake root, bathed in milk and fed on blood, which mirrors the real-life fetus that drains the mother of life. The sinister faux baby squirms and squeals when thrown on the fire. Finally, fantasy may follow reality. A luscious feast of blood-red berries and jellies, guarded by Doug Jones's truly disturbing Pale Man (his eyeballs inserted into the palms of his hands), echoes the real-life dinner for the Francoist victors presided over by the sadistic Captain, which we have already been shown.

Fauns and other creatures. Top right: *The Chronicles of Narnia The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe* (Andrew Adamson, 2005). Bottom right: *Hellboy* (Guillermo del Toro, 2005)

Ofelia's mother tells her daughter that life is not like the fairy stories with which she is obsessed. Complicating the relation between life and art and avoiding simple dichotomies, del Toro suggests, disturbingly, that it is. Francoist Spain is a world of suspended time, symbolized by the Captain's stopped watch, which his father smashed at his moment of death. The Faun's evocation of the fantastic realm to which Ofelia will return as Princess is also fixed and frozen: however many centuries pass, still it will remain the same. Del Toro's grotesque wooden creature (an alarmingly uncomfortable prosthetic design encasing Doug Jones, the piscine Abe Sapien of *Hellboy*, once more) could hardly be further from another recent film faun, the friendly, furry Mr. Tumnus (James McAvoy) of *The Chronicles of Narnia* (2005), a project del Toro says he was offered but turned down. When, late in *Pan's Labyrinth*, Ofelia rushes to embrace her Faun, viewers will feel distinctly uncomfortable. While Captain Vidal is obsessed with his baby son's safety, the Faun has more sinister plans: Ofelia's third task will be to hand over her brother for sacrifice.

In the final shot of *Pan's Labyrinth*, blood leaks from Ofelia's nostril, repeating and reversing the first image we saw one hundred minutes earlier. The haunting hummed lullaby, whose words we are told are long forgotten, is heard once more. Del Toro's camera swoops up over the tragic tableau (shot like much of the film in unnervingly thick shadow) but dissolves to a shot of the dead tree, now with a magical flower blossoming on its sterile bough. The eternal stick insect buzzes by. While the suggestion of innocent sacrifice and redemption is disturbing, the image remains a worthy symbol of del Toro's achievement. He has taken a tiny terrible moment in Spanish history and translated it into a masterful film with which global audiences and prize juries alike clearly feel a deep and emotional connection. It is a feat of cinematic Esperanto that transcends both the supposed exile of Mexican cinema and the alleged non-communication of national cultures.

PAUL JULIAN SMITH is the Professor of Spanish in the University of Cambridge. His most recent books are *Spanish Visual Culture: Cinema, Television, Internet* (Manchester University Press, 2006) and *Television in Spain: From Franco to Almodóvar* (Boydell and Brewer, 2006).

ABSTRACT Guillermo del Toro's *Pan's Labyrinth* reimagines the bloodshed and tyranny of the period immediately after the Spanish Civil War in terms of a fairy tale, which may be a girl's fantasy. This review argues that the film's achievement is to reinforce not reduce historical horrors.

KEYWORDS del Toro, Spanish cinema, Mexican cinema, Spanish Civil War, fantasy

David Lynch videoing Laura Dern on the set of *Inland Empire*

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Inland Empire

Director, writer, editor: David Lynch. Producers: Mary Sweeney, David Lynch. Camera operators: David Lynch, Erik Crary, Odd Gehir Saether, Ole Johan Roska. Music: Angelo Badalamenti.© 2006 Inland Empire Productions, Inc. U.S. distribution: 518 Media Inc.

David Lynch is on familiar ground in the long-awaited *Inland Empire* (2006), which tells the story of Nikki Grace (Laura Dern), an actress who breaks out of mid-career stagnation in Hollywood. In *Mulholland Dr.* (2001), Lynch previously chronicled a woman in movieland, narrating the trials of Betty Elms (Naomi Watts), a would-be Hollywood starlet. The theme of women in the media is, moreover, familiar to the moviegoing public, going back as far as *Ella Cinders* (Alfred E. Green, 1926), and more memorably alive in *Sunset Blvd.* (Billy Wilder, 1950), and *Mommie Dearest* (Frank Perry, 1981). Unsurprisingly, however, Lynch makes it all seem new as he rejects the tendency of standard mainstream films to depict an actress's life in terms of stereotypical domestic turmoil. Lynch prefers, much more interestingly, to delve into the creative process of female artists.[1]

From first to last, in charting Nikki's destiny, Lynch places the spectator in a maelstrom of creative energy, as he plays reflexively with movie icons and structures. Using digital technology that evokes the grainy images of underground film (later he will use the same equipment to evoke slick Hollywood cinematography), he begins *Inland Empire* with a dark screen that is explosively ruptured by a beam of light resembling that of an old-fashioned film projector, which slowly illuminates the title. In a juxtaposed, similarly nostalgic-yet-unsettling image, a phonograph needle in extreme close-up traces a groove on a vinyl record, producing static, the sound of applause, and a difficult-to-hear voice speaking about an old hotel. Confronting us immediately with the medium's visual and aural technologies, Lynch then, postponing Nikki's entrance, uses them as springboards to his unconventional and invigorating version of expository introduction. Instead of Nikki, we see the labyrinthine corridors of the old hotel mentioned on the record and a man and woman whose

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faces are mechanically obscured, as in television "reality" police shows. Voices emerge from this haze of pixels that suggest that she is a fearful and disoriented prostitute and he a brutal john. Cut to a young, dark-haired woman (Karolina Gruszka) crying as she watches this scene on a television screen. Cut to the most unforeseen of all the images in *Inland Empire*: a room that is patently a low-budget television set, in which human-sized rabbits (Laura Harring, Naomi Watts, and Scott Coffey dressed in anthropomorphized costumes) speak and move listlessly. A laugh track interjects its processed sounds at unmotivated moments. This mise-en-scène is intercut with a highly ornate, old European drawing room in which two anonymous men in business clothes speak to each other angrily and impatiently in Polish. Subtitles disclose that there is a search on for something.

If these fragments were not so defamiliarized and reflexive, each of them would be flatfootedly conventional expository hooks. The scene in the hotel room arouses spectatorial anxiety for the woman, an orthodox enough prompt for narrative engagement; similarly, as the male "rabbit" in the television sitcom announces that he has a secret, he evokes another common way of constructing suspense. The two foreign men, speaking tensely about looking for "something," might be in an international thriller. Here, however, these widely diffuse and idiosyncratic prefigurations of mystery, suffering, and discovery send genre expectations flying. Nothing jells; and yet each of these elements raises the spectre of the anxieties that will erupt in the story to come.

Nikki makes her entrance after this prologue when a foreigner, a Polish woman who tells her that she is new to the neighborhood, arrives on the doorstep of Nikki's mansion. Suddenly everything looks, for the moment, reassuringly realistic. At first, the unnamed Polish stranger—identified in the credits as Visitor #1 (Grace Zabriskie)—merely seems a little eccentric as she sits down to coffee with Nikki, her chatty remarks punctuated by comic facial and vocal tics.[2] But, in true Lynchian fashion, Visitor #1's eccentricities mutate into more disturbing peculiarities. She starts to display an uncanny omniscience about a movie role for which Nikki has just auditioned as well as what might be a prophetic insight into Nikki's life. "Is there a murder in this film?" asks the visitor. "Does your husband have anything to do with it?" Though distressed by the direction of this conversation, Nikki answers both questions—in the negative. "*You are wrong*!" barks the previously prim Visitor #1, and then growls about a "brutal fucking murder." This would seem to be the last straw, but the woman points to a settee across from the couch on which the two women are seated and tells Nikki that if it were tomorrow, she would be sitting over there. Nikki, moving into an altered state of consciousness, begins to see herself and her friends "over there," tomorrow, at the moment that she will get—is getting—the news that she has been cast in the part. In this visitation, the elements to which we have been introduced in the opening frames as raw, disconnected building blocks—sexual fear, the media, and the presence of the foreign—start to take shape as a recognizable narrative, albeit one that prolongs an altered state of consciousness too in the audience. To create audience appetite for entering into this dreamlike adventure, Lynch adds a new element: desire—specifically Nikki's desire to play the role that she hopes will resurrect her career, and our desire to see what will happen to her as she does so.

A SIMULACRUM OF CREATIVITY

These complex desires inform our journey with Nikki as she creates the role of Susan Blue in a film-within-a-film called *On High in Blue Tomorrows*. But *Inland Empire* explodes the rules of prefiguration that have been invoked, since here time present is also time past and time to come. Through its slippery use of time, *Inland Empire* offers the possibility of a specific experience—a simulacrum of the experience David Lynch undergoes as a creator. For, if this rhythm of things does not correspond to ordinary narrative conventions, it does correspond with the way Lynch has described the birth and development of his movies.

If we have heard little from Lynch about the meaning of events or images in any of his films, he has said a great deal about his creative process that nicely illuminates *Inland Empire*.[3] During a press conference at the New York Film Festival (6 October 2006) and during a long personal interview with me (13 October 2006), Lynch described in detail the evolution of the film in terms that resemble the expository process of *Inland Empire*. About five years ago, Lynch, visualizing an isolated fragment of what was eventually to become *Inland Empire*, wrote a fourteen-page, single-spaced monologue for a woman that he and Laura Dern recorded with a digital camera, even though neither of them had any sense of any larger whole it might develop into. The process was repeated with other fragments and finally something began "to jell"—a process of desire, as Lynch called it. As each fragment made itself manifest to him, the desire it provoked in him drew the next fragment into existence, until an organic sense of the whole made itself manifest. Lynch's de-

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Clockwise from top left: Grace Zabriskie as the uncanny visitor; Laura Dern as Nikki Grace with a chorus of women embodying her internal state; Nikki and Devon Burke (Justin Theroux) as Susan Blue and Billy Side, the adulterous lovers in *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, the film-within-the-film

scription of this creative evolution confounds any neat distinctions between time future, time past, and time present: the whole being made manifest to him was always there, much like the mysterious, thrilling pattern of *Inland Empire*, as it reveals itself slowly. As the audience waits for the bits to "jell," Lynch provides for us Hollywood's *sine qua non* of desire to pull us along on this voyage, a star: Laura Dern, Nikki Grace.

Similarly, although Lynch's unorthodox narrative techniques will eventually allow us to transcend clichés, at first the film seems to be poised to resolve its strangeness into a good, non-threatening wallow in conventional melodrama, when Lynch adds to the pot the standard elements of the romantic triangle: Nikki's co-star, Devon Berk (Justin Theroux), a darkly attractive womanizer, and her husband Piotrek Krol (Peter J. Lucas), a possessive and dangerous man. When Nikki and Devon are interviewed on television by Marilyn Levens (Diane Ladd), a crass gossip columnist, she imposes a low form of popular discourse on them as she imagines an affair. Gushing, she warns him not to try anything with Nikki. "I'll be watching," she tells him in an irritating singsong voice. Ironically, if we as audience members would like to distance ourselves from the awful Marilyn, we are, in fact, all too like her at this point, encased in generic expectations and "watching" for Devon to make a move. When Nikki overhears her husband ominously warn Devon to steer clear of her, Marilyn's insinuations seem to be on target. Similarly, a life-imitating-art dynamic appears to be in progress when we learn that the film-within-a-film, *On High in Blue Tomorrows*, is about a married woman, Susan Blue (Dern), who has an affair with a married man, Billy Side (Theroux). For good measure, the director, Kingsley Stewart (Jeremy Irons) tells Nikki and Devon, confiding to them the secret history of *Blue Tomorrows* that he calls the story-inside-the-story, that the first time someone tried to film this script the two co-stars were

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Clockwise from top left: Peter J. Lucas as Piotrek Krol, Nikki's threatening husband; Susan's distress after the affair has gone sour; Lynch on set with Dern, Harry Dean Stanton, and Jeremy Irons

murdered. With this melodramatic disclosure, it is almost as if we have ventured into *Murder, She Wrote*.

But a story-within-a-story is not necessarily a matter of backstage gossip. And the audience is invited to reject the superficial "Marilyn syndrome," when Nikki blurts out during a love scene that might be in the film-within-the-film or a part of Nikki's "real" life, "It's me Nikki!" Her exclamation shifts the action away from the banality of paranormal stories of curses or adultery, and into an exploration of identity that takes place as a part of Nikki's creative struggles to find her character. This journey takes her and us under the surface of the affair between Billy Side, the master of a large Southern mansion, and his employee, Susan Blue, into a dark and violent place in which Susan hits the raw nadir of women's rage in the battle between the sexes. Maneuvering through populations of women who may or may not be real in an external sense, Nikki forgets all about the potential triangle and instead finds the story-within-the-story, in its most profound sense, as she discovers both Susan and herself at the same time, when she struggles through Susan's harrowing sexual encounters and her own deepest and most frightening desires.

NIKKI'S VICTORY

Amazingly for an American film, the erotic aspects of Nikki's voyage into identity and artistry require her to free herself from a man-centered narrative. By the end of the film, both Devon and Nikki's husband have disappeared. The construction of the film in the image of Lynch's creative process becomes visible as a way of articulating Nikki's journey as a creative one in which she hazards her identity as she creates Susan Blue, complete with a sexual history that feeds symbiotically on Nikki's personal biography, in order to arrive at a higher form of self-knowledge. This act of female artistry requires Nikki to confront a spectrum of women, possible mirrors of herself, until she and Susan reach

rock bottom when Susan is murdered as a result of her adultery and dies on the Hollywood "Walk of Stars," while other homeless women comfort her. When the camera pulls back to reveal that this is a movie set, Nikki is praised by director Stewart for her performance. But, confounding any expectation that his praise should be the accolade for which Nikki has striven, she, oblivious to the public show of admiration, just drifts by him as he follows her from the set.

Nikki's success is counted neither in industry rewards nor coupledom but rather, in my reading of the ending of *Inland Empire*, in the energizing of her life and artistry through inner awareness. Her voyage takes her from the mausoleum-like opulence of her cavernous mansion back to that same but much-changed location. Initially, Nikki seems a bit like a younger Norma Desmond (Gloria Swanson) in her empty *Sunset Blvd.* manse. But whereas Norma ends up deluded, fulfilling the stereotype that career success wounds women, Nikki's work nets her abundant life and bliss. *Inland Empire* reaches closure as we return to her drawing room, which is now bursting with the energy of a crowd of diverse women, both dancers and witnesses. As I read this scene, the exuberant women represent a carnival vision of a radiant inner unity Nikki has achieved; the scene thus recalls the circus sequence in Federico Fellini's *8½* (1963), which symbolizes the state of mind of Guido (Marcello Mastroianni). In Fellini's film, however, Guido's inner coherence is possible only after the film-within-the-film that Guido is planning to direct fails to materialize. In *Inland Empire*, Nikki's internal bliss works in conjunction with her position as an artist. This is underscored by the last line of the film. One of the women in Nikki's fantastic entourage, identified in the credits as The Marine's Sister (Tracy Ashton), makes it clear that the manifestation of Nikki's new wholeness is not at odds with her commercial success. This woman endearingly intones, as she savors Nikki's expensive digs in a way that is a world apart from the rote compliments offered by the intrusive visitor in Nikki's first scene, "Suh-weet!"

The clichés that the star is reduced to a cultural sign and industrial marketing device, and that she colludes in her cultural sacrifice as a commodity, tend to play out in conventional films about actresses as the loss of conjugal, sexual, and familial love and some form of death. In *Inland Empire*, Lynch creates a scenario in which Nikki Grace transcends the power of the media to define and limit her and, instead, plays out her empowerment as she uses the media for her creative and personal purposes, as a catalyst for her own inner explorations and definition.

The "rabbitized" humans evoke the trivialized portrait of human life favored by the entertainment establishment. The evocations of the "foreign" become a representation of how threateningly what comes from beyond the known (and restricted) world appears within the confines of popular culture. Ultimately, however, neither violence, nor the media, nor what seems foreign engulfs Nikki; rather her character Susan Blue dies for her—an appropriate, even classical, function for a fictional character—so that Nikki can leave the fear and violence of her character's existence behind her, to emerge purged of Susan's complicity in her doom as she depends on others to define her identity: "Look at me. Tell me if you recognize me from somewhere." In this tale about the distinction between the empire within and the surface realm of worldly achievements (but also about their connections), Lynch radiates a potent optimism that explores, through the creative power of a woman artist, the ways in which the seeming limits of a violent world predicated on commodities and empty signs can become instrumental to the evolution of an organic form of victory and pleasure. Suh-weet, indeed.

NOTES

1. In my review of *Mulholland Dr.* in *Film Quarterly* 56, no. 1 (fall 2002), 37–45, I explore how Lynch uses the story of Betty/Diane to trace the inevitable death of a creative impulse, and the collateral damage that occurs simultaneously, as soon as it is completely controlled and defined by the power structure of the commercial mass media. For all intents and purposes, in that film, creativity enters a black hole in which all being becomes nothingness, and only the memory of possibility remains.
2. I am indebted to Jay Aaseng, David Lynch's personal assistant, for sending me the cast list. This and all other references to the credits are derived from this document.
3. David Lynch's recent relative comfort in speaking with the public about his process has been a long time in the making. When he and I first met in 1990, he was visibly agitated at the thought of speaking about anything regarding his work. Over the years, particularly since he has been making personal appearances on behalf of the David Lynch Foundation, he has become more accustomed to direct communication with the public. Driven by a desire to give students at all levels the tools of mediation in order to better cope with our increasingly violent world, he has (as he explained to me in our conversation on 13 October 2006) had to get used to public speaking.

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ABSTRACT This review argues that David Lynch's digitally filmed *Inland Empire* defies the conventions of the generic behind-the-scenes Hollywood about an actress's struggle for success. Rather than demonizing or trivializing female creativity, Lynch celebrates a woman artist's use of a banal industry for transcendent purposes.

KEYWORDS Lynch, creativity, women artists, actresses, film-within-a-film

Ken Watanabe (center) as General Kuribayashi in *Letters from Iwo Jima*

Flags of Our Fathers

Director, music: Clint Eastwood. Producer: Robert Lorenz. Screenplay: William Broyles Jr., Paul Haggis (from the book by James Bradley, Ron Powers). Director of photography: Tom Stern. Editor: Joel Cox. © 2006 DreamWorks LLC, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. U.S. distributor: DreamWorks Distribution. DVD: DreamWorks Video (U.S.).

Letters from Iwo Jima

Director: Clint Eastwood. Producer: Robert Lorenz. Screenplay: Iris Yamashita. Director of photography: Tom Stern. Editors: Joel Cox, Gary D. Roach. Music: Kyle Eastwood, Michael Stevens. © 2006 Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc, DreamWorks LLC. U.S. distributor: Paramount Pictures.

The late careers of artists are intriguing to study. They may darken their vision like Goya, achieve a final joyousness like Beethoven or Jean Renoir, bid farewell to the essence of their art like Shakespeare, or just keep on turning out what has succeeded before, like any number of popular novelists, painters, and musicians—giving their large audiences what they've been conditioned to like and expect. One frequent pattern of the late career has also been a kind of classicism, recapitulating prior work in a spare, attenuated form. Hemingway, Hitchcock, and Ford might be examples of this, all treating their past as a kind of personalized genre, within whose conventions they can play freely.

Where among these possibilities does Clint Eastwood, who turns seventy-seven this year, fit? Even admirers of his iconic performances in Sergio Leone's 1960s trilogy of so-called spaghetti Westerns and his debut as star–director in the memorable but limited *Play Misty for Me* (1971), could hardly have predicted the long and varied shape of his subsequent career. An actor in between fifty and sixty films, the director of almost thirty, already the recipient of a Life Achievement Award from the American Film Institute (1996) and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Directors Guild of America (2006), nominated for a best director Oscar for *Mystic River* (1993), and winner for *Unforgiven*

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Kazunari Ninomiya as Saigo in L*etters from Iwo Jima*

(1992) and *Million Dollar Baby* (2005), not to mention similar awards from less prestigious or at least less visible venues for many of his other films—Eastwood certainly seems as good a candidate as anyone to be allowed to rest on his laurels.

But in 2006 he comes out with not one but two films—*Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*—which tell the story of the battle over that strategically crucial but physically bleak Pacific island. *Letters*, although shot entirely from a Japanese point of view with not a single recognizable American actor and only one relatively well-known Japanese actor (Ken Watanabe), was one of the five nominees for Best Picture at this year's Academy Awards.

If nothing else, these two films constitute a remarkable movement in Eastwood's late career to more and more challenging projects. Die-hard auteurists may make a case for *7 Women* (1966) or *Rio Lobo* (1970) or *Family Plot* (1976) as brilliant summaries of the past work of Ford, Hawks, or Hitchcock. But Eastwood has somehow managed to keep up the pressure of innovation and artistic expansiveness. At the same time he has become the face of classic American film to the rest of the world with *Unforgiven*, *The Bridges of Madison County* (1995), *Mystic River*, and *Million Dollar Baby* winning best foreign picture and/or best director prizes in France, Japan, Italy, Spain.

Letters has received a lot more of the press and critical attention than *Flags*, the most expensive film Eastwood has yet made, which appeared to great critical fanfare and appreciation in October 2006 but never found an audience, perhaps because it was shunned by both the supporters and detractors of the Iraq war: too jaundiced about patriotism for the pro-war crowd and too much of a war film for those disillusioned with the war. *Letters*, which was first shown in Japan in November, may have benefited from some of the same circumstances when it opened in the U.S. Its sympathy with the enemy's point of view, as well as its emphasis on the conflict between the common soldier's human feelings and the rigid official code of military honor that demands death before surrender, holds a useful mirror up to more current inflexibilities of policy and strategy.

Letters is definitely a fine film, but *Flags* is impressive as well. While each is a whole in itself, both are tremendously enriched by their juxtaposition and should be seen as a diptych. Each depends on a crucial aspect of modern war, which also has an eerie resonance in any visual art—the essential invisibility of one side to the other. Modern war, certainly since the rapid development of long-range rifles and armament in the nineteenth century and of course even more so with aerial bombardment, is death at a distance, to kill and be killed by people you can't see and don't know. While both films use virtuoso special effects to present the horrific battle for Iwo Jima and each focuses on an array of combatants, the central revelation is that neither side really knows much of the human nature of the other. In such a war, the ancient honor of hand-to-hand fighting with an enemy you may actually know is lost in the anonymity of shelling, bombing, and modern weaponry, even when there is a need, as in Iwo Jima, to battle for every inch of soil. In a style sometimes visually reminiscent of Kon Ichikawa's 1959 *Fires on the Plain*, cinematographer Tom Stern has drawn on digital intermediate processing to create an attenuated palette of pewter grays and pumice browns for the Iwo Jima sequences in both films, highlighted by the red of flames, blood, and the flags. (The original title of *Letters* was *Red Sun, Black Sand.*) In the memory sequences of *Letters*, more colors emerge, but still muted, whereas the stateside scenes of *Flags* have the gaudy harshness of public celebrations.

The visual bleakness of the battle scenes perfectly captures the moral landscape of the conflict. Little grows on Iwo Jima (Sulfur Island in Japanese). It is a bare, austere world, the setting for a battle that seems equally spare and absolute. The historian John Dower's 1986 book about the battle for control of the Pacific is called *War Without Mercy*. Unlike the war in Europe, where an Allied admiration for German military ability was often voiced, the war in the Pacific was a racial war, between nations that had little empathy with each other and virtually incompatible codes of military conduct. American movies have generally reflected that bias. The "good German" was already becoming a cliché even before James Mason starred as Erwin Rommel in *The Desert Fox* (1951), hardly six years after the war was over. Little such absolution was available for any member of the Japanese military until perhaps *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970), co-directed and co-scripted by Japanese and American filmmakers, unless we count the standoff between Lee Marvin and Toshiro Mifune in *Hell in the Pacific* (1968).

Flags and *Letters* take a different approach entirely. Most strikingly, both are based on documents from those who did not live through the battle and interviews with those who did, primarily on the American side, since of the 22,000 Japanese defenders of Iwo Jima, few survived, due to the military code that enforced suicide as the only honorable alternative to surrender. The discovery of the eponymous and never-delivered letters home bookends the narrative of *Letters*. The voiceover of James Bradley, on whose 2000 book (with Ron Powers) the script is based, is an intermittent binder in *Flags*. In part the film reflects his search for what his father and the five other men who are hoisting the flag in the famous Joe Rosenthal photograph experienced in the battle and afterwards, as this inconsequential moment of their time on Iwo Jima became the focus of intense and overwhelming national attention back home.

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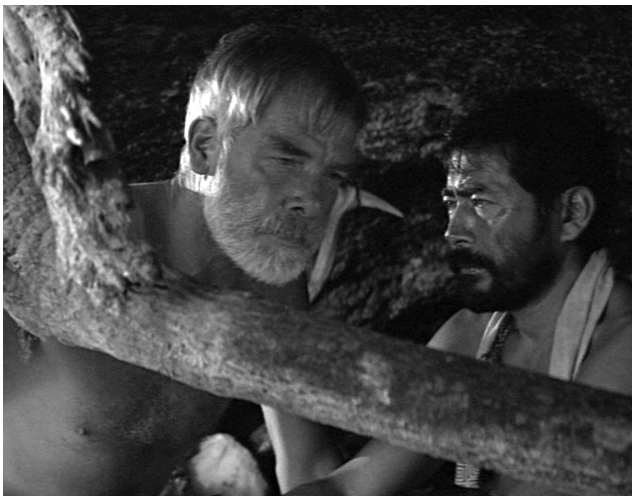
Flags of Our Fathers (top) echoes *Fires on the Plain*



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Lee Marvin and Toshiro Mifune in *Hell in the Pacific*

The occasional voiceover in *Flags* joins voiceovers or documentary style in several films this past few years. Two otherwise disparate examples are *Little Children* and *United 93* (both 2006). Few in this revival speak in the voice of *March of Time* omniscience characteristic of past journalistic documentary. Nor are they efforts to mend the narrative flow when the footage or the script is lacking. For all the documentary side of both *Letters* and *Flags*—shaking cameras, battlefield angles, overlaid titles with time and place—the emphasis is on the exploratory and the tentative rather than the settled. The scene is the chaos and arbitrary death of the battlefield rather than the fatal and melodramatic necessities of more fictionalized war stories. There is nothing in *Letters* and little in *Flags* even about the strategic necessity to take Iwo Jima to furnish a landing field for American planes attacking the Japanese mainland. One B-29 does limp in towards the end of *Flags* to make the point that the slaughter has saved lives. But for the most part both Japanese and American fighters are there because they were ordered to and they did what had to be done. James Bradley's book alternates between what's happening to the men on Iwo Jima and the big picture of war strategy in a kind of *Grapes of Wrath* way. But until the three surviving flag-raisers are yanked back to the States to spearhead a war bond drive, it is their personal story. And even in the midst of the celebrations of their 'heroism' back home, their

thoughts and nightmares pull them back into the maelstrom of war.

I put heroism into dubious quotation marks in that last sentence because in fact the question of heroism is at the center of the two films. Both films anatomize national heroic fantasies. In *Letters* it is the fantasy of Japanese absolute military honor, and the cold brutality it often sanctions. In *Flags* it is the fantasy of full-tilt American fame, incomplete without publicity, confetti, pounding drums, and cheering crowds. Superficially, Japanese warrior purity, the Spartan-like determination that death in battle is the only true form of male honor, would seem to trump the American cult of celebrity, where looking good is more important than acting well. But at a more pervasive level, *Flags* and *Letters* similarly condemn the way each national myth ignores the human reality of war.

Looking back over the classic patterns of war stories, I am tempted to call *Letters* Eastwood's *Iliad*: almost unrelievedly preoccupied with the grit and terror of the battlefield itself, fascinated by different types of fighters and their varying responses to war—the careful, intellectual general; the by-the-book martinet; the playboy cavalier whose compassion overrides his discipline; the underlings scorning the general's inexperience and angling for his job; the common soldier just trying to survive; the gung-ho soldier who realizes all he has been told of the sanctity of the cause is absurd.

By contrast, *Flags* is Eastwood's *Aeneid*: filled with courage and fortitude, arbitrary death, and horrifying wounds on the battlefield, but preoccupied as well with the demands of national destiny, and infused with something like the *Aeneid*'s own sense of the human price that has to be paid for Rome to be born. For the prime topic of *Flags*, more so than *Letters*, is emphatically military fame in contrast with military honor. But the difference between Eastwood's films and those two epics is that their semi-documentary style and their focus on the grunt in the front line rather than the epic hero essentially subverts the heroic mode.

The three central characters of *Flags of Our Fathers*—a Navy corpsman and two Marines—are the survivors of the six who raised the flag on Iwo Jima. Their photograph by A.P. photographer Joe Rosenthal quickly became one of the most pervasive images in American history, reproduced in thousands of magazines, on millions of posters, and on the first U.S. stamp to depict living persons. In the early 1950s it was to become the inspiration for the largest bronze sculpture in the world, the sixty-four-feet-high Marine Corps War Memorial. As soon as picture editors and politicians realized the power of the photograph, these three men—John Bradley, Rene Gagnon, and Ira Hayes—were taken off military duty (the flag-raising occurred on only the fourth day of a thirty-six-day battle) and became the figureheads for a war bond drive aimed to refill government coffers at a time when good news was hard to come by and revenues were distinctly insufficient to meet war needs.

The visual bleakness of the battle scenes perfectly captures the moral landscape of the conflict. Little grows on Iwo Jima (Sulfur Island in Japanese). It is a bare, austere world, the setting for a battle that seems equally spare and absolute.

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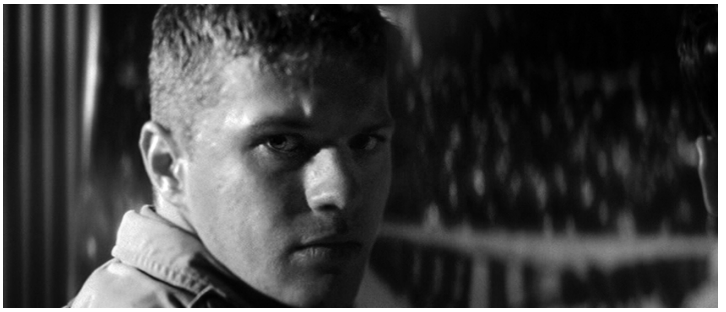
John Wayne and the flag-raising in *The Sands of Iwo Jima*

MILITARY FAME IN *FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS*



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Not only were they pressed into service as spokesmen for the (tremendously successful) war bond drive, they also played bit parts toward the end of Alan Dwan's *Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949), when the story finally gets to Iwo Jima and (the fictional) Sgt. Stryker, played by John Wayne, gives them the flag to take up the hill just before he is killed by sniper fire. Ira Hayes, the Pima Indian, in particular had an elaborate movie life, including incarnations after his death by Lee Marvin in *The American* (1959) and Tony Curtis in *The Outsider* (1961).

Caught in the swirl of patriotic celebration, the three men, all in their early twenties, represent three different attitudes toward the adulation they received as a result of a 1/400th-of-a-second photograph. Pressed on by his fiancée and later wife Pauline, Rene Gagnon tried to capitalize on his fame only to spend his life as a janitor. His fame may momentarily allow him to bump a bird colonel off a plane, but it can't get him a job once the spotlight has moved on. Ira Hayes, disgusted with the talk of himself as a hero when what he considered to be the real heroes were dead on the beaches or the rocky hills of Iwo Jima, ended his short life with a combination of drink and hypothermia. Only John "Doc" Bradley, the Navy corpsman, managed to maintain his sanity and equilibrium, raise a family, and run a successful funeral business by almost entirely refusing to acknowledge his role in the events that gave him brief fame. His own family did not know he had won a Navy Cross on Iwo Jima until after his death.

Two of the three main characters in *Letters* share some of the irony of this spotlight: General Kuribayashi (Watanabe), who has moved from his post as head of the Emperor's Palace Guard to lead what will turn out to be the suicidal defense of Iwo Jima, with all naval and air support withdrawn; and Baron Nishi (Tsuyoshi Ihara), the dashing horseman who still carries a crumpled picture of himself at the 1932 Olympics winning the equestrian competition. The third is Saigo (Kazunari Ninomiya), a former baker taken from his family while stay-at-home members of the much-hated Kempeitai (military police) took over his business.

Saigo is the classic draftee, willing to do his duty but more than dubious about the reasons for war to begin with. We first see him at the beginning of the film when he and his friend Nozaki (Yuki Matzusaki) are vainly digging holes in the shifting sands of the Iwo Jima beach. A punctilious officer hears them, accuses them of treason, and beats them with a bamboo pole until he is stopped by Kuribayashi, who has just arrived on the island. Kuribayashi turns up again in time to save Saigo, when yet another honor-driven officer will try to execute him and another soldier for deserting their position on Suribachi, even though that had been Kuribayashi's order. Saigo reminds Kuribayashi that he has helped him once before, and Kuribayashi responds, "Everything happens in threes." He will save Saigo once more by telling him to stay behind from the final suicide attack and burn the unmailed letters home. Saigo buries them instead and thus generates the entire film and ensures the memory of those who died.

As Kuribayashi's gesture toward Saigo indicates, it is accidental meetings and the vagaries of human will that dictate the narrative of both films, rather than fate, melodrama, or some teleological thrust to victory and defeat. Paul Haggis, who wrote the screenplay for *Million Dollar Baby*, is the co-scriptwriter with William Broyles Jr. in *Flags* and shares co-story credit with Iris Yamashita, the first-time screenwriter of *Letters*. But the hammerlock causalities and coincidences of a Haggis film like *Crash* (2004) are nowhere in sight, and it is tempting to imagine Eastwood with his jazz musician's sense of improvisation undercutting the more obvious connections.

The coming together of the six flag-raisers is one example. It is in fact the second time a flag marks the taking of Mt. Suribachi. Often difficult to distinguish from one another in their helmets or their military crewcuts, the men casually arrive from one task or another until they meet together on the summit. Even Rosenthal, their ticket to immortality, thinks he has missed the moment. As another photographer tells him on his way up the volcano, it's all over. But the visiting Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal, wants a souvenir, the captain is damned that this politician will take the company flag, and so sends up Gagnon with another flag to be raised. The celebrated moment is thus entirely happenstance, but happenstance that will be reproduced millions of times and take on a life of its own.

With this emphasis on the arbitrariness of events that create the image of heroes, it is hard not to see something of what attracted Eastwood to the story—men transformed by a visual art into more than human figures. The thread that runs through so many of Eastwood's best films, and the theme that he has particularly focused on in his later career, is the exploration of the clash between personal and socially expected ideas of masculinity and especially masculine heroism. In *Unforgiven* those expectations come from the Western genre itself, from which William Munny (Eastwood) has opted out and to which he must now measure up. In *Mystic River* they are the expectations of a tight tribal neighborhood, which gives Jimmy Markum (Sean Penn) his power in exchange for a constant need to dramatize it. In *Million Dollar Baby* they are the expectations of a rough male physical sport, whose standards

Letters from Iwo Jima: the battlefield

Photo: Merle W. Wallace. SMPSP. © 2006 Warner Bros. Pictures

Frankie Dunn (Eastwood) must stretch and even break to accommodate his growing feeling for his protégée Maggie Fitzgerald (Hilary Swank). There as in *Flags* and *Letters* the image of the self-sufficient hero has been found wanting. Behind the credits of *Flags* a quavery male voice sings "I'll Walk Alone," a 1944 song heard later in the film as sung by Dinah Shore. It's a song of the woman waiting for her lover who is at war, but the unidentified singer in *Flags* is clearly Clint Eastwood, in an odd riff on his image as The Man with No Name.

Instead of sight and seeing being absolutes, in the interplay between the two films they are complex variables. The raising of the flag on Suribachi in *Flags*, so crucial to American morale, in *Letters* is seen from a far distance, a minute stick on the horizon. The grenade in *Flags* dropped down an airhole to protect attacking American marines in *Letters* envelopes in deadly flames characters we have met and begun to know. The marines in *Flags* who are killed and wounded by Japanese fire may be the same who in *Letters* kill surrendering Japanese soldiers in flight from officers who tried to kill them for deserting. There are not many of these parallel moments, but they serve to emphasize the intriguing mixture of distance and empathy with which Eastwood has made the films. Both the Americans and Japanese have been faceless enemies to each other, while the films have been constructing their individuality.

As in so many films lately, there is little of the star presence in either *Flags* or *Letters*, and when it does appear it is undercut with irony. Flashbacks are freely distributed among different characters. No one central consciousness dominates. Kazunari Ninomiya, who plays Saigo, may be a megastar in Japan while Ryan Phillippe, who plays Bradley, is perhaps the best-known of the main American performers. But all have that somewhat unformed young-man look, emphasized by their unmarked faces, their uniforms, their haircuts, and their frequently naïve conversation and callow jokes. Jesse Bradford's Gagnon has some surface charm ("our Tyrone Power" he's called at one point) but little beyond that, while Adam Beach as Hayes is a darker figure, whose torment is at the other end of the continuum from Bradley's reticence.

In this tension between the star and the cast, the individual and the group, Eastwood's style of directing actors has a role to play as well. Known for going with the first or an early take of a scene, Eastwood has an appreciation for what Richard Schickel has called "the spontaneous gesture . . . the rough, unpolished line reading over the more-carefully-considered one." That emphasis on catching the performance before the line reading has hardened here, yielding characters who are uneasy in the roles they have to play as marines and even more so later as heroes. Also relevant here is Eastwood's preference for an ensemble nature of acting, which Schickel argues derives from his training in the methods of Michael Chekhov, as well as his habit—like Ford, Renoir, and others—of working with an ongoing

group of filmmakers (here especially the late Henry Bumstead, the production designer, the late Phyllis Huffman, the casting director, and Tom Stern, the cinematographer, previously the gaffer on several Eastwood films).

Towards the end of *Letters* a wounded marine is brought into the cave where Baron Nishi and his men are planning a last stand. The men want vengeance, but Nishi speaks to him in English until he dies of his wounds. Nishi then finds a letter from the young man's mother and reads it in Japanese. As he reads and as the Japanese soldiers begin to realize such a letter could have come from their own mothers, they rise to acknowledge their mutual humanity.

I have called *Letters* Clint Eastwood's *Iliad*, but it is not an *Iliad* of grand single combats between heroic warriors so much as one of hierarchy and subordination and submission to rigid ideals that leave little room for individual nature. By the same token, the American emphasis on a Roman style of parades, flashbulbs, and celebrity in *Flags* seems to idealize the common soldier, even while it reduces him to a cog in the cultural machinery. In their various and sometimes intertwined ways, both *Flags* and *Letters* try to pay tribute to their characters and the real people on whom they are based by being as true to their deaths as to their lives. One look is shared by John Bradley and Saigo, a look backward for Bradley as he remembers the difference between Iwo Jima and the fake Suribachi he climbs at Soldier Field for the bond drive, a look into the camera as Saigo lies wounded on the beach, one of the few Japanese survivors of the battle. It is a look from two erstwhile enemies whose lives as soldiers have not been that different, a look into the eyes of the audience that says "know me."

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ABSTRACT This comparative review of Clint Eastwood's *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima* sees the two films as a diptych exploring issues of military masculinity, heroism, and myths of American and Japanese national character as they are focused by the battle for Iwo Jima in World War II.

KEYWORDS Eastwood, war films, Iwo Jima, late style, heroism

Deviation

Director, writer: Jon Griggs. Music: Nicholas J. Sumner. © 2006 Hard Light Films. Internet distribution: hardlightfilms.com/deviation.

Red vs. Blue: The Blood Gulch Chronicles

Directors, writers: Bernie Burns, Matt Hullum. Producers: Burnie Burns, Matt Hullum, Geoff Ramsey, Jason Saldaña, Gustavo Sorola. Music: Nicolas Audy-Rowland. © 2003–07 Rooster Teeth Productions. Internet distribution: rvb.roosterteeth.com.

"Machinima" is an awkward portmanteau that joins "machine" and "cinema" to describe computer-animated movies that are shot within video games and distributed primarily online. Originating in the desire of gamers to capture and share their in-game experiences, machinima are created by recording onscreen video game play in real time, then editing that captured footage into a digital movie. The difference between machinima and traditional computer-generated imagery (CGI) is that machinima use the interactive 3D graphics engines of existing video games as virtual movie sets in which to perform scenes on-the-fly, rather than rendering custom animation for each scene individually, one frame at a time. Animated films can therefore be created and distributed cheaply and easily by anyone who can control characters in a video game.

Machinima boosters assert that the true art of machinima will only flourish when it moves beyond its origins in gamer communities to embrace the narrative conventions and production values of mainstream film. Yet it is precisely the remarkable self-reflexivity of machinima—the way these game–movie hybrids use cinematic narrative to challenge video-game logic, and game culture to challenge filmmaking paradigms—that makes them, for the moment, so arresting.

PUPPET FACES

At the 2006 Tribeca Film Festival, audiences encountered the big-screen debut of the machinima short film *Deviation*. Accompanied by the staccato drone of helicopters, white text on a black background at the beginning of the film informs us that this is "A virtual film created online. With virtual actors performing across different U.S. states. Who have never met each other or the director in the 'real' world." The film follows a team of four soldiers tearing urgently through underground tunnels. One discontented soldier named Macintyre cynically believes that they have experienced this suicide mission innumerable times before, and vainly tries to convince the others to break out of the

Photo: Rik Panganiban, used with permission

The 2006 Machinima Awards simulcast in Second Life

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Photos: Rik Panganiban, used with permission

Deviation director Jon Griggs's avatar (left) at the Machinima Awards preview screening (right) in Second Life

rote cycle of carnage. Acted out through standard avatars provided in the online multiplayer video game *Counter-Strike*, the film imagines the existential horror of actually living one's life within the bloody, militaristic, single-goal-driven world of a first-person shooter game. As the soldiers charge through the claustrophobic maze of tunnels, under the omnipresent threat of attack, Macintyre becomes increasingly vocal about his misgivings. "Doesn't it strike you as strange, I mean we keep doing the same thing over and over again?" He is silenced by the team leader right before the soldiers climb up through a manhole to be slaughtered off screen in a rain of bullets and blood. Macintyre looks on in disgust.

Deviation startlingly recontextualizes the inexpressive faces, hyperbolic assault gear, and uncanny bobble of video-game characters by imagining that these characters could be capable of introspection. However, we realize that although they look thrilling in motion—streaking across the screen in a pack or aiming their weapons—game characters are poorly equipped for standing still and carrying on a serious conversation. Each character's pre-rendered visage is frozen into a scowl that reveals as much hidden life in close-up as a puppet's face. What is more, their bodies idle uncomfortably in a state of constant agitation, as if impatient to leap into action. The polygonal fabric of the characters' facemasks crudely bunches and stretches to indicate when they are talking, their eyelines fail to match, and their weapon-gripping bodies pulse restlessly in animated motion loops. It is precisely this dissonance between video-game graphics organized around combat and movie dialogue organized around angst that lends *Deviation* its defamiliarizing power. As the first machinima film to premiere at a major festival, *Deviation*'s theatrical screening at Tribeca marked the breakout of this Internet-fueled, gamer-geek mode of virtual filmmaking into mainstream cinema.

Deviation screened again several months later at the 2006 Machinima Awards Festival, also in New York, but with a significant twist. In a strange simulacrum of the mainstream cinema event that marked machinima's cultural legitimization, the preview screening and awards ceremony simulcast took place within Second Life (secondlife.com), an online 3D virtual world that allows its millions of members to interact with each other through their self-created avatars within an expansive, freeform alternate universe. Users unable to physically attend the festival in New York could log into Second Life, navigate their avatars into the designated movie theater, and find a seat in a crowd of other avatars (including a child with a pink-ribboned hat, a goateed man in a tux, a floating ghost, and a green-skinned fellow on roller skates) to watch the proceedings and hear from filmmakers who were in attendance via their own avatars. In yet another dimensional layering, if anyone was unable to attend the virtual events within Second Life, they could still watch the live simulcast supplied by Destroy TV (dtv.sheeplabs.com), a special avatar with a video camera who streams in-world footage to the web. These multidimensional machinima events both imitate the festival and award-ceremony rituals of film culture, and transform those rituals by moving them back to the online virtual spaces in which machinima films were originally created and exchanged.

Hollywood's widely reported box-office decline is frequently attributed to the rise of video games and the

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Deviation, clockwise from top left: charging through underground tunnels; close-up on Macintyre; *Counter-Strike* characters are unable to lower their weapons, even when conversing; Macintyre's troop

Internet as top competitors. And the declaration that the video-game industry now outpaces the movie industry in revenues has become commonplace. Yet it is increasingly clear that mainstream cinema is deeply imbricated in the much-touted development of Internet and video games. One suspects while watching the tiresome protractedness of racing and fighting scenes in CGI spectacles like the *Star Wars* prequels (1999, 2002, 2005), *The Matrix* sequels (2003), *King Kong* (2005), and the *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003, 2006, 2007) franchise that they were inserted specifically to sell the video-game versions of the films. At the same time, video games strive for cinematic photorealism—pushing processing resources towards rendering lush, immersive worlds that replicate cinematic devices down to camera angles, close-ups, and even lens flares. Games themselves commonly contain non-interactive animated movies called "cut-scenes" that narratively frame the gameplay and serve as rewards for progress through game levels. And video-game trailers solicit viewer anticipation not by emphasizing gameplay, but by directly poaching the voiceover narration, montage, special-effects spectacle, and genre conventions of film trailers. It should come as no surprise then that, having absorbed the visual language of cinema, video games would in turn be used to *create* cinema. Thus machinima films register key tensions in the increasing synergistic convergence of these two supposedly antithetical forms, old and new media, cinema and video game.

Although it celebrates the radical possibility of filmmaking distributed across a network of distant collaborators who meet in the virtual studio of an online game, *Deviation* soundly condemns the pointlessness of video-game violence and shows no enthusiasm for gameplay. And that might explain the film's appeal to mainstream cinema. Cinephiles threatened by the incursions of video games into film culture *want* to condemn the emotionally vacant, compulsively repetitive "run-and-gun" logic of first-person shooters. *Deviation* therefore reveals the conditions of machinima's acceptance into mainstream cinema—cast off your in-jokey, gamer roots and join the serious ranks of Hollywood narrative film. In fact, unlike most other machinima works, which are released online shortly after completion and become widely available through multiple, proliferating Internet sources, *Deviation* preserved the luster of the theatrical premiere by releasing only a trailer to the web, withholding the full work until after the film screened at Tribeca. Moreover, the film is now distributed online, but primarily through the broadband entertainment network AtomFilms, which offers a licensing contract and royalty payments to independ-

ent filmmakers whose work is selected to appear on their website. *Deviation* critically re-appropriates the capabilities and conventions of the game *Counter-Strike*, which is itself a fan-created modification of the commercial game *Half-Life*, which is itself based on a heavily modified version of the *Quake* game engine. But it eschews the democratized, free-for-all video-sharing typical of Internet phenomena like peer-to-peer networks and YouTube in favor of the institutionally authorized, carefully curated programs of the film festival or film distributor.

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Red vs. Blue, from top: "Why are we here?" (episode 1); "it's just a box canyon in the middle of nowhere (episode 1); a soldier's dead body "rotting in the sun for all eternity" (episode 18); neurotically malfunctioning war machine (episode 42)

MALINGERING IN THE DESERT

Deviation's serious-minded critique of repetition and futility within the world of first-person shooters owes its "Why are we here" theme if not its tone to the most well-known machinima work to date, the ongoing comedy series *Red vs. Blue: The Blood Gulch Chronicles*.[1] Unlike *Deviation*, *Red vs. Blue* remains unabashedly saturated in the lowbrow world of game culture. In the first episode of the series, released shortly after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, the camera glides up the face of a precipice to show two Red soldiers in full body armor standing on the ledge of a desolate futuristic landscape. In addition to the familiarity of the battle-geared figures, the ever-present target reticule in the center of the screen reminds us that this is *Halo*,[2] the best-selling Xbox game where you control a cybernetically enhanced warrior fighting a confederacy of alien races that threatens to destroy humankind.

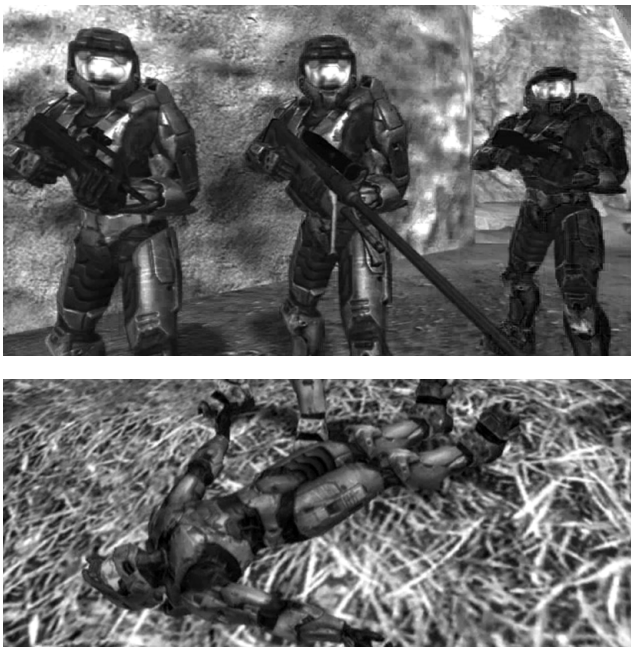
We expect the pair of gun-toting storm troopers to bark out military gibberish and leap into action. Instead, they just stand around talking, and we slowly discover through their desultory exchange that they have no idea what they are doing there, nor why they are fighting: "I signed on to fight some aliens. Next thing I know . . . I'm stuck in the middle of nowhere, fighting a bunch of blue guys." There is then a cut to the other side of the canyon, where two Blue soldiers impatiently observe their sworn enemies through a sniper rifle. But they save their sharpest hostility for each other as they bicker over how to read the Red soldiers' puzzling lack of action. This lack of action, as if the soldiers were trapped in dead-end office jobs rather than engaged in high-tech warfare, is *Red vs. Blue*'s central absurdist premise. With cinematic antecedents in both *M*A*S*H* (1972) and *Office Space* (1999), *Red vs. Blue* points to the affinity between militaristic aggression fantasies and the embittered "cubicle class" of the technically proficient but low-status, white male knowledge-worker.

Although it is filmed within the *Halo* game engine, *Red vs. Blue* undermines the enemy demonization and zero-hour urgency of the original game narrative, as well as the game's play mechanics based on conquest of space, constant action, and slaughter. Each team of soldiers in *Red vs. Blue* plots to obliterate the other team, but they actually spend most of their time malingering in the same bleak desert canyon, trading sophomoric insults, and complaining. Many of the gags seem lifted straight from the gamer wisecracks, trash talk, and performative play that accompany a round of multiplayer *Halo*. Because machinima is recorded in real time, it retains some of the spontaneity of gameplay, where quick decisions and reflex actions ricochet between players and game machine. Thus *Red vs. Blue*'s satiric banter and meandering serial form reflect the shared social experience of multiplayer gaming from which the show emerged. In counter to alarmist claims, reminiscent of 1970s apparatus theory, that increasingly immersive 3D games absorb players to such an extent that they lose their grip on reality, *Red vs. Blue* reminds us that gameplay takes place in a structured but open-ended social space. It is a space of playful experimentation and therefore of unexpected behaviors and identifications that occur not only within the game world itself, but

also in the multiple on- and offline social networks that surround it.

Machinima emerged in the late 1990s as video-game players started to record their gameplay and then post these clips to aficionado websites in order to show off particularly nimble or audacious onscreen moves to other players. To make this raw footage of gameplay more compelling, players started setting their clips to music, adding their own commentary and voice tracks, and even staging elaborate maneuvers that involved multiple players. Players discovered what game designers now build into the gameplay experience—that adding strategic editing, propulsive soundtracks, and snappy wisecracks to video-game footage amplifies the affective drama of having your tautly coordinated team maneuver suddenly sabotaged by one player's misstep, or of pulling off that perfect comeback attack while tottering on the brink of death. Players also turned their recordings to tricks and glitches within the game environment that are irrelevant to scoring points or leveling up. Instead of simply playing the game to win, players started to test the boundaries of the simulation itself, using the game as a playground, laboratory, or stage. Gamers orchestrated and captured virtuoso in-game stunts such as the synchronized hip-hop dance routine of two alien fighters who are usually fighting each other, the stratospheric pirouette of a military jeep when a live grenade is placed beneath it just so, or a programming bug that results in the disappearance of all vehicle animations from a freeway so that the drivers look like Wonder Woman flying her invisible plane.[3] Machinima thus arose from the desire to document specific moments experienced in the sprawling, open-ended, imperfectly coded virtual worlds offered up by contemporary video games, and to share these experiences with other players.

Although the first four seasons of *Red vs. Blue* have been released as feature-length DVDs, the cult success of this now-canonical work of machinima is due primarily to Internet distribution across online gaming communities. A new episode of *Red vs. Blue* has been released from the Rooster Teeth Productions website (rvb.roosterteeth.com) approximately every week since the series debut, and the total number of video downloads per week now tops one million. Fans scramble to post the first comments in response to each new episode, usually dashing off brief, chummy exclamations of praise that are characteristic of online chatter, like "Awesome. Nice work."[4] But the paucity of expression in each individual comment becomes irrelevant when it chimes into a chorus of a thousand posts per episode. The point is not what you say, but that you announce your affiliation with this huge social network



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Red vs. Blue: recent episodes are created with the improved graphics of *Halo 2* (episode 94, top); another body no one knows what to do with (episode 69, bottom)

of other game enthusiasts. When I last logged in, there were 2186 other users online at the same time, and the total number of registered members is now close to 600,000. In addition to communicating with other members through forums, messaging, and comments, registered users can create personal profiles and online journals.

GAMER CRITIQUE

Why should we be interested, then, when gamers use games to make movies about gaming for other gamers? For one, despite its geeky connotations, "gamer" is no longer such an exclusive or subcultural category: "gaming" has become an important paradigm for conceiving of interactivity, emergence, participatory culture, virtual communities, and other cultural transformations wrought by digital media. Moreover, the convergence of video games and cinema, so that video games feel more cinematic and cinema feels more game-like, is making it increasing difficult to distinguish "gamers" from "cinephiles." In addition, insofar as the video-game industry has intertwined with the war industry,[5] *Red vs. Blue*'s send-ups of game logic become critiques of war logic as well. The series actively works against the elaborately detailed *Halo* mythology, in which humans battle for survival against a covenant of alien races unified by their religious fanaticism. In *Halo*, the protagonist is a hyperbolic incarnation of a masculine empowerment fantasy: a well-armed cyborg super-soldier known only as Master Chief, who is completely encased in battle armor from helmet down to prominent

codpiece. In *Red vs. Blue*, the combat suits and big guns seem ridiculous when the soldiers are cowards and the authorities incompetent. The majestic, gorgeously rendered landscapes that *Halo* is famous for are absent from the series, which is set in the gravel-strewn desert of Blood Gulch. Instead of penetrating into picturesque terrain that is ripe for exploration and conquest, the characters languish in this empty canyon, ambitionless and bored.

The few action scenes, usually ending in some sort of catastrophe, are the result of accident and incompetence rather than a strategically planned mission. Thus attacks are initiated by misrecognition and battles are initiated by machines gone haywire. By repeatedly staging gags around the accidental death and re-animation of soldiers on each team, *Red vs. Blue* points to the fundamental unreality of video-game death: it is impermanent. Getting killed in a video game like *Halo* is a frustrating but temporary setback, a brief hiccup in the drive toward mastering the game. Death is built into the game mechanics. Without taking risks that kill you, or learning through trial and error, you could never progress through each level. Moreover, the game's "rag doll physics" make each death a unique, kinetic spectacle of collapse. But rather than promising advancement or spectacle, the soldiers' inability to irrevocably die in *Red vs. Blue* contributes to the absurdity of their plight. There truly is no way out of this barren wasteland and meaningless war. Not only is warfare a lot of waiting punctuated by random blunders, but these blunders have no real stakes in the absence of permanent death.

Digital technology's transcendence of the human body is pushed to the limit as the characters' mech-warrior bodies become puppet shells to be comically brutalized, killed, and then discarded for better ones. *Red vs. Blue* reminds us that although video games like *Halo* are organized entirely around the thrills of violent attack, they have no capacity to register its material consequences. When the ghost of an accidentally killed soldier notices that days after his death, his old body is still ignominiously flopped on the ground where he fell, he demands to be buried. "Buried with what?" his comrade retorts. "All we have are pistols and rifles. What do you want me to do? Shoot you a grave?"

NOTES

1. The producers of *Red vs. Blue* recently announced that the series would be ending in May 2007 with its 100th episode. See the Rooster Teeth website, http://rvb.roosterteeth.com/forum/viewTopic.php?id=2205248.
2. In first-person shooters such as *Halo*, seeing is synonymous with targeting, so the target reticule remains a stark reminder of the analogy between camera and gun. See Alexander Galloway, *Gaming, Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006) for an account of the cinematic origins of the first-person shooter perspective. But the *Red vs. Blue* creators do block out the *Halo* game's heads-up display (the display of data such as player health and ammunition levels) with letterboxing over the top and bottom of the screen.
3. *Dance, Voldo, Dance* (2005) made in *Soul Caliber*; *Warthog Jumper* (2002) made in *Halo*; and *Buggy Saint's Row: The Musical* (2006) made in *Saint's Row*.
4. See the Rooster Teeth website, http://www.roosterteeth.com/archive/episode.php?id=211.
5. See Ed Halter, *From Sun Tzu to Xbox: War and Video Games* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2006) for a history of the intersections between gaming and military culture.

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ABSTRACT Machinima are computer-animated films shot within video games that expose possibilities and pitfalls in the increasing convergence of cinema and video games. By satirically dramatizing the inner lives of video game characters, machinima works *Deviation* and *Red vs. Blue* undermine the cycle of combat and death that drives first-person shooters.

KEYWORDS machinima, video games, computer animation, new media, death

Reel Paradise

Director: Steve James. Producers: Steve James, Scott Mosier. Cinematographer, co-producer: P. H. O'Brien. Editor: Steve James. Music: Norman Arnold. © 2005 View Askew Productions. U.S. distribution: Wellspring Media.

Sisters in Law

Directors: Florence Ayisi, Kim Longinotto. Producer, cinematographer: Kim Longinotto. Editor: Ollie Huddleston. Music: D'Gary. © 2005 Vixen Films. U.S. distributor: Women Make Movies.

To some extent, every documentary made about another culture is descended from Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* (1922). Chronicling Inuit life in 1922, Flaherty produced something greater than a travelogue—he told a story with drama, action, humor, and warmth that attempted to truly communicate the spirit of another culture. Eight decades later, the two filmmaking teams behind *Reel Paradise* and *Sisters in Law* embarked on their own expeditions to far-away lands. Indie film guru John Pierson transplanted his family from Manhattan to the Fijian island of Taveuni so that he could show free movies to the locals at "the most remote movie theater in the world." Seasoned documentarian Steve James agreed to film the last month of the year-long project, at Pierson's request. Meanwhile, British documentarian Kim Longinotto teamed up with Florence Ayisi and ventured to the West African nation of Cameroon, gathering footage of the emerging Women Lawyers Association and their work for local women and girls. The resulting features, *Reel Paradise* and *Sisters in Law*, reveal the good and the bad of how much has changed since Flaherty's time—in the motivation to document other cultures and the politics of doing it.

Witnessing people's first moviegoing experiences and the sheer joy films can bring is appealing to a society saturated with moving images, and particularly to Pierson. As he puts it, "I truly wanted to capture the essence of how fantastic it was to see an audience seeing a movie in a place where there was almost no other media and movies had a primacy that they might have had in 1932."[1] But cinematic potential becomes a problem in *Reel Paradise,* as inspiring footage of the culturally isolated Fijians excitedly absorbing their first motion pictures can only sustain about five minutes of a documentary. The rest must explore the impact of those first screenings on the Fijians and on the American family that makes them possible. James focuses almost solely on the latter, to the detriment of *Reel Paradise*. Episodic segments showing the difficulties the Piersons have adjusting to island life dominate the film—John contracts dengue fever and can't find a reliably sober projectionist, his wife Janet surfs the Internet when she's not socializing with her neighbors, and teenagers Georgia and Wyatt wait for the unpredictable bus to a school where theirs are the only white faces. In his focus on the Piersons rather than the Fijians, James even follows storylines that have nothing to do with Taveuni or the screening project. When Georgia stays out late getting hickeys from local boys, Janet arrives to pick up her rebellious daughter. Watching them bicker and each accuse the other of "acting for the camera," I could have been on my couch with *The Osbournes* or *My Super Sweet Sixteen.*

What we do find out about the Fijians and how the free movie project affects them is limited. The only significant Fijian character is Georgia's best friend, Miriama, who latches onto the Pierson household partially as an escape from violence and abuse in her own. Georgia passes on (teenage) American values to her friend, to her parents' dismay—Miriama stays out late, skips school, and gets a tattoo that matches Georgia's. John and Janet point out the dangers of this influence. Georgia will go back to America, but Miriama will have to stay in Fiji and readjust to the mores of her culture. The Piersons could turn that argument on themselves—one year after arriving in Fiji, they go home as planned. The Meridian 180 Cinema closes its doors, and the Fijians have to readjust to life without their American neighbors and the filmic gifts they brought.

James's fixation on the Piersons at the expense of screen time for the Fijians reveals a lesson documentarians have learned perhaps too well from *Nanook*. Since the release of Flaherty's film, criticisms have been leveled against it for condescending to and appropriating the Inuit culture. Damning scenes of the grinning Nanook trying to bite into a gramophone record or intertitles that describe the Inuit as, "simple . . . happy-go-lucky Eskimo[s]" represent, for many, a positioning of non-Western peoples as backward, silly savages. Documentary history is full of filmmakers who exploit or condescend to other cultures. And even the most thoughtful, well-meaning ethnographers are haunted by their "inability to do anything but misrepresent that other person," as filmmaker Ken Feingold phrases it.[2] As the "ailing genre"[3] of ethnographic documentary opens to experimental methods and the voices of the Others themselves, many filmmakers have strengthened their resolve to "know difference differently"[4] than their ethnocentric predecessors.

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Opting instead to mostly ignore their Others, James and Pierson create this documentary that is ostensibly about the effects of Hollywood cinema on a remote Fijian community, but that is actually about the effects of *showing* Hollywood cinema to Fijians on charitable, vacationing Americans. In trying not to offend, Pierson and James reveal very little about the culture in which they were immersed. James's failure here is particularly disappointing, considering his compelling portraits of different subcultures in *Hoop Dreams* (1994) and *Stevie* (2002). The real problem is that if sensitive, thoughtful filmmakers like James are unwilling to bring foreign cultures into focus for American audiences, the task will fall solely into the all-too-eager hands of reality TV producers. In shows such as *Survivor* or *The Amazing Race*, American contestants try to "survive" living or working the way natives of the countries they visit do, with locals serving as props or sidekicks in these adventures. Competitors experience foreign lifestyles as game challenges that exhaust and disgust them—walk two blocks balancing baskets of corn on your head, drink a pint of cow's blood, eat four pounds of regional meat at a traditional barbeque.

Thankfully, Longinotto and Ayisi's *Sisters in Law* resembles *Reel Paradise* just as little as it does *Survivor* or *The Amazing Race*—though its release was, unfortunately, far more limited than even *Reel Paradise*. This is a film that really digs into another culture and reveals something important and moving about its people while maintaining a high level of respect for its difference. The format here is total immersion, with no white faces to guide audiences. Instead of repressing change and trying to preserve another culture, as Flaherty did, Longinotto and Ayisi focus on change, exploring the shifting legal system in Cameroon as it clashes with traditional gender roles. *Sisters in Law* opens almost immediately into the middle of a legal case. A young mother comes in with a complaint: her child was stolen by its father, with her own father's compliance. The men protest, but the woman behind the desk—Vera Ngassa, who we soon learn is a state prosecutor—quickly straightens them out. "It is called kidnapping," she declares, "That's not the way to behave . . . That's what you men do. You just harvest children all over the place without marrying the mothers." The mother instantly gets her child back. For an audience trained to believe in the hopeless oppression and powerlessness of third world women, this scene—and the film that it opens—plays like a quiet miracle. Here is a justice system in Africa where women's rights are starting to be successfully upheld—by women, no less. This particular miracle is one of many that have passed before Longinotto's lens throughout her impressive career documenting trailblazing "women elsewhere." These women include unusual drag kings in Japan in *Dream Girls* (1994), wives seeking divorce and runaway girls in Iran in *Divorce, Iranian Style* (1998) and *Runaway* (2001), and girls undergoing and fighting against female genital mutilation in Kenya in *The Day I Will Never Forget* (2002).

> Maybe Benjamin's idea that everything on this planet can and will be reproduced is no longer the primary threat because it has already happened.

The rest of *Sisters in Law* is similarly structured around a series of Ngassa's cases. Two Muslim women—Amina and Ladi—file suit against their husbands for rape and domestic abuse. Amina's story is developed most as we see her go before many different authority figures—lawyers, judges, the men of her family, and an all-male Muslim divorce committee—trembling each time, but insistent. The other two cases in the film involve young girls. Sonita, a ten-year-old, must testify against her twenty-five-year-old rapist. Manka, age six, hardly says a word, but bears witness with her scarred body to a series of brutal beatings from her aunt. Each time, Ngassa and her female colleagues far exceed their legal obligations, visiting clients at home after the cases are over or buying new clothes for the mistreated girls. Ngassa even buys medicine for Manka's abusive aunt, now in prison, and assures the repentant old woman that though she did a very bad thing, "We don't hate you."

Although the differences in style between *Reel Paradise* and *Sisters in Law* are quite striking, one of the most significant is subtle. While both James and Longinotto depart from Flaherty's style of direct, bias-laden commentary on his subjects like "poor old Nanook," the two handle the sticky ethical situations they are so fond of documenting differently. Ethical ambiguity is the stuff James's documentaries are made of, and he wants his audience to know it. In *Reel Paradise*, different sides of the unresolved issues are lined up neatly: is Pierson an altruist or an egotist? Do the free movies help or harm the Fijians? Here is a scene that supports one side; here is a scene that supports another. The judgment is left to the audience, but the stakes of the case are clear and plenty of evidence is presented. Ironically, the same cannot be said of the legally themed *Sisters in Law*. Longinotto and Ayisi present a complex

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Reel Paradise, clockwise from top left: the theater, Fijian spectators, John lecturing, the farewell ceremony, Miriama and Georgia, Wyatt in a crowd

sociopolitical situation and make it look simple: Cameroon has changed, so traditions must catch up with women demanding equal rights. Any challenges the Women Lawyers Association faces are minimized by a tone of strength and triumph. For example, it is not until the last scene as everyone is celebrating Amina and Ladi's liberation that we find out that in seventeen years as a prosecutor, Ngassa had never before secured a spousal abuse conviction. Also, comments that might raise flags are quickly uttered and quickly lost in the narrative, such as Ngassa's accusation in the opening scene: "You, Father, your daughter has become merchandise. The way you people play in the villages, the way you play with women and children . . . That's what makes her his wife? 80,000 Francs and a pig?" The sight of an educated, probably middle-class woman condemning poorer, rural people who "play" with silly customs could certainly offend, but the filmmakers never overtly *identify* this or any other complicating issue the way James would. If there is a problem with the way the women on screen operate, audiences have to find it themselves.

This refusal to identify issues lines up with Longinotto and Ayisi's larger attitude of non-intervention and self-effacement—a strictly observational style. Just as there are no outsiders on screen to guide the audience, there is also no narration, no intertitles, and only one interview scene in the whole film. So little infor-

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Sisters in Law, clockwise from top left: Ngassa takes a break with her son, Kumba Town, a lawyer counsels Amina, Ngassa celebrates with Amina and Ladi, Judge Beatrice Ntuba, a court officer reprimands an abusive husband

mation is given about the filmmakers that a casual viewer would certainly miss one of the film's most important safeguards against ethnocentrism: British Kim Longinotto is the more experienced filmmaker of this pair, but her co-director and translator, Florence Ayisi, was born in Cameroon. This style of partnership is standard practice for Longinotto, who always finds (and generously credits as co-director) a woman to collaborate with who knows the culture and the language. More than acting simply as translators, these women frequently advise Longinotto on creative and ethical decisions—as do the subjects themselves, significantly. Thus, Longinotto demonstrates a genuine effort to consult and understand the people of whatever country she is filming in rather than just throwing them up on screen.

Sisters in Law is not the corrective for *Reel Paradise* and this is not a case of "good filmmaker, bad filmmaker." There are certainly problems with Longinotto and Ayisi's invisible style. Unavoidably present outsider perspectives are not acknowledged, issues can seem one-sided, and audiences may be misinformed or confused due to the lack of contextual information. Bill Nichols confirms that observational ethnographies, "once valorized as part and parcel of observational respect for one's subject," have since been attacked within the field as deceptively self-effacing.[5] But what *Sisters in Law* does offer that *Reel Paradise* does not is a sense of

this Other that is not deliberately dripped through the filter of American (or British) whiteness. Longinotto and Ayisi give us a well-crafted, focused film that really says something about a small, manageable aspect of another culture and the people who shape it. As the credits rolled, I knew that I was not an expert on Cameroon, I knew that I did not truly understand its people, but I also knew something about them that I did not know before. The only people I really knew (far too much) more about by the end of *Reel Paradise* were the Piersons themselves.

Flaherty's impulse to make *Nanook of the North,* and its popularity upon release, evoke one of the most eloquent ideas in film theory: Walter Benjamin's notion of the annihilation of the "aura"—that slippery, magical quality that emanates from an object when witnessed in-person. Benjamin says that our desire to eliminate physical distance, to bring the world (for example, the Inuit lifestyle) "closer" through technological reproductions (such as photos and films), is robbing these objects and places of their auras. But maybe Benjamin's idea that everything on this planet can and will be reproduced is no longer the primary threat because it has already happened. We feel like we've traveled to every land and met every person through our TVs and computers. Now we're bored with those reproductions and to keep our interest, the powers-that-be must remanufacture them in our own image. It's the difference between taking a picture of Mt. Everest and taking a picture of Mt. Everest with Aunt Betty smiling and waving in the foreground. We want proof that we were there, and, if possible, we want to leave a footprint; we want "there" to register our presence. And maybe it's this kind of egoism that dictates the focus of *Reel Paradise* and Pierson's free-movie project as much as the fear of cultural disrespect. Once upon a time, we asked Nanook to show us his world. We wanted to understand it, however naïve and condescending our attempts may have been. Filmmakers like Longinotto and Ayisi still want that. But if *Reel Paradise, The Amazing Race, Survivor,* and the like are any evidence, now most of us just want Nanook's world on loan. We'll play in it, pat ourselves on the backs for our adventurous spirits, and, above all, take some pictures of ourselves there for the folks back home.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Anthony Kaufman, "PG-Fiji: A Pacific Whim Leads to a Remote Movie Theater," *Village Voice*, 16 August 2005, http://villagevoice.com/film/0534,kaufman,66916,20.html.
2. Ken Feingold, "Notes on *India Time*: The First in a Series of Videotapes," *CNA Newsletter*, May 1998, 16–22, quoted in Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 66.
3. David MacDougall, "The Subjective Voice in Ethnographic Film," in Leslie Devereaux and Roger Hillman (eds), *Fields of Vision: Essays in Film Studies, Visual Anthropology, and Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 218.
4. Nichols, 91.
5. Ibid., 68.

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ABSTRACT Steve James's *Reel Paradise* and Kim Longinotto and Florence Ayisi's *Sisters in Law* exemplify divergent paths in the field of ethnographic documentary since 1922's formative *Nanook of the North*. The observational style of *Sisters in Law* bests the self-indulgence of *Reel Paradise*, though both films present ethical challenges.

KEYWORDS documentary, ethnographic documentary, observational documentary, Steve James, Kim Longinotto

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■ D. I. GROSSVOGEL

Haneke: The Coercing of Vision

MICHAEL HANEKE SAID IN AN interview about *Hidden* (2005), "I try to give back to violence that what [sic] it truly is: pain, injury to another": assuming that cryptic statement were readily assimilable by American critics, it would have done little to alleviate one of the grievances formulated by the French against the United States, that their films seldom excite American box offices. There are of course exceptions: *Amélie* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001) was among the ten most popular films in this country during several weeks after its opening. Audrey Tautou, a French reincarnation of Audrey Hepburn, brought an elfin and endearing quality to the film's heroine, a young woman who moves through the gritty realities of unrewarding jobs, her mother's suicide, her own loneliness, in order to find the pot of gold at the end of a rainbow (as convoluted as any Rube Goldberg might have devised) by making herself and others happy. She succeeded equally well with American audiences: during the first half year of its run, the film earned well over $30 million and ended up garnering five Oscar nominations. More typical of the fate suffered by French imports in this country, *Hidden* (*Caché*) had earned only a tenth of *Amélie*'s gross during its first six months, after winning the Critics' Prize in Cannes and being voted best film at the European Film Awards in Berlin, while Haneke was crowned the year's best director (he was also the film's writer), and the male lead, Daniel Auteuil, was named best actor.

Hidden was, in many ways, the climactic achievement of the Austrian director's career to date, one that might be divided into two parts: his first films, made in his own country, and the ones that followed once he was able to seek a wider stage. The first brought him two kinds of recognition—*succès d'estime* or *succès de scandale*—and required understanding whether the violence that permeates his films derived from a desire for sensationalism rooted in the filmmaker's psyche, or whether it was part of a more rational strategy.

THE AUSTRIAN FILMS

Among the problems his spectators came up against was the director's resolve to make "anti-psychological" films: audiences, especially American ones, are accustomed to having characters react as they themselves might to the circumstances of the plot. At the start, with *The Seventh Continent* (1988), Haneke began by removing the plot entirely: he found the film's story in the widely reported account of a family's collective self-immolation. Though a suicide note explained that this economically comfortable family could no longer endure living in our world, the police did not accept it, and, as no other explanation was forthcoming, Haneke set out to *show* how the daily repetitions of a trivialized existence lead ultimately to the rage that causes its victims to destroy their material possessions and ultimately themselves: the alarm set every day for 6 a.m., the cash register that tallies the demands of consumerism, the move up the ladder to a job as dehumanizing as the previous one, the television screen singing about the power of love before a family whose members no longer have anything significant to say to each other (a blank screen that will continue to be on long after those who might have looked at it are dead).

The cataclysmic ending is made especially difficult to accept, as furniture and people are savagely smashed. Yet, it is only a part of Haneke's essential brutality: his picture is informed by his quiet, unrelenting, seemingly detached accumulation of the details that dehumanize modern existence. Four years later, *Benny's Video* begins by returning to a prime instance of that dehumanizing evidence, the television screen, the instrument that most trivializes as it documents the worst of the human

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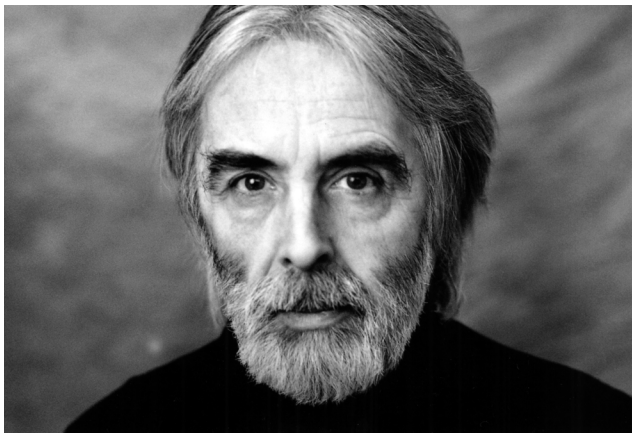

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Michael Haneke in a publicity photograph at the time of the production of *Hidden*

condition. The image obsessively analyzed by the spoiled rich kid (Arno Frisch) in his sophisticated studio is that of a pig being slaughtered. His viewing is interspersed with other agencies of the same dehumanizing process, newsreels, commercials, film clips—the aggregate ugliness of our times whose quantity and repetitiveness have turned them into mind- and soul-numbing clichés. On one of the rare occasions when Benny leaves his shuttered room, he meets a girl (Ingrid Stassner) in a video store (she too appears to exist primarily in this mediated world), brings her home, and then shoots her, inserting himself into this new scene of slaughter, as if the image were both the only reality and its exculpation. The film has other statements to make—such as the attempt by Benny's parents (Angela Winkler, Ulrich Mühe) to conceal the murder, a criminal extension of their wealth-induced indulgence, even though they show no human extension towards each other or him—but these stand as nearly asides in a story of vacuity and alienation brought on, as in *The Seventh Continent,* by what Freud saw as the discontents of our "civilization"—the social structures constraining primal drives that respond to a law of psychological energy, pushing back with a force equal to the one with which they are pushed down.

These two films are part of a trilogy (the *Vergletscherungs-Trilogie*, which translates best as "Glacier Formation," evidencing Haneke's belief that Austria was sinking into what he saw as emotional "glaciation"), of which the third, *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994), once again used images and scenes disjunctively to echo a fragmented and dehumanized reality. The people's lives, seen as scattered shards, are once more observed with Haneke's dispassionate eye, his stationary camera rendering their vegetative existence. But in that they were drawn from many parts of society's depressed social classes (in contrast to those whose outwardly comfortable lives contrasted their increasing despair) the film stands as a marker of the direction in which Haneke would eventually move.

In their various forms, these films are depictions of a stultifying society seen through an Austrian lens. He made one more such picture before expanding that vision, *Funny Games,* in 1997, whose title derives from the threatening words of one of the two men (Arno Frisch, Frank Giering) who have broken into a holiday residence, frightening, torturing, and ultimately killing those who live there. Here, the detachment of Haneke borrowed from Brecht's *Verfremdung* (distanciation) technique: the torturers step out of character in order to address the audience, give a conventional psychobabble response to an anguished question about their cruelty, reject a plea that they stop the torture by saying they have not yet reached feature length. When the woman (Susanne Lothar) manages to wrestle away one of the intruders' gun and shoots him, the other rewinds the picture and inverts the action: following Brecht's recipe to achieve critical distancing, Haneke wants the spectator to see, instead of actual violence, a picture about violence.

The Austrian films were the bedrock upon which Haneke's oeuvre rests, but that bedrock was too bare for the great majority of his spectators. True, critic–philosophers (especially the French) were able to bring into their analyses the theories of Marc Augé ("supermodernity": the superabundances of modern culture prevent rooting and doom us to endless transience), Gilles Deleuze ("actual/virtual": we are as affected by the "image" of the world as by actuality [reality] itself), Jean Baudrillard ("simulacrum": the image has actually come to stand for reality), etc. This was not what might be expected of even a reasonably enlightened viewer. The kind of distancing Haneke envisioned worked too well on most of them, turning on itself: the sight of two psychopaths terrorizing, maiming, humiliating a household, destroying it gratuitously, became for them just that—a sadistic exercise in which the spectator *believed* to the extent of finding it unpleasant, distasteful, perverted. Haneke himself may have felt this. In 2000, with *Code Unknown*, he began making pictures featuring French actors and casting a wider sociological net; a process marked by *The Piano Teacher* (2001), *The Time of the Wolf* (2003), and culminating in *Hidden*, pictures in which he preserved his original intentions but fleshed them out so as not to simply alienate the spectator but to effect his "separation" through a prior entrapment.

THE DIFFICULTY OF *HIDDEN*

Reduced to its bare bones, *Hidden* is the story of Georges (Auteuil) and Anne Laurent (Juliette Binoche),

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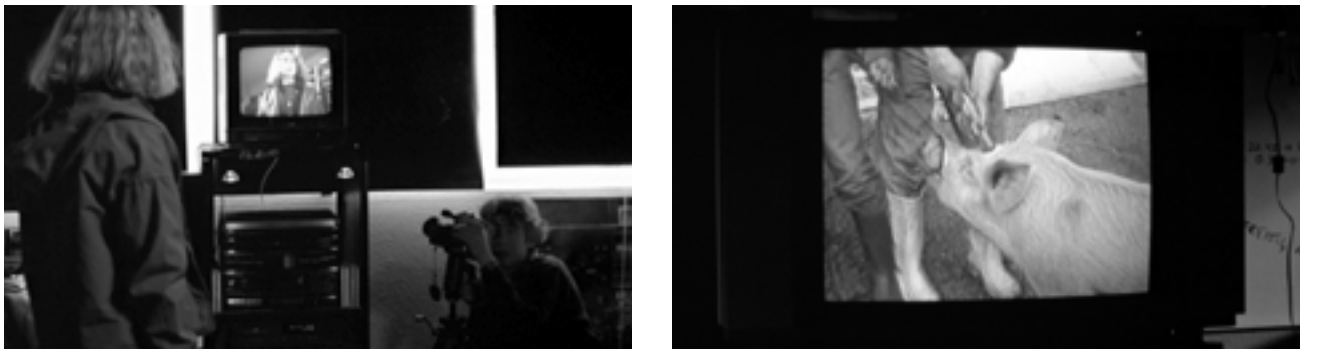
Alienation in *The Seventh Continent*

well-to-do intellectuals enjoying a comfortable life: he is the host of a literary TV talk show (on the model of Bernard Pivot's long-running and hugely successful *Bouillon de culture*); she works for a publishing house and is a writer herself. Their son Pierrot (Lester Makedonsky) is the kind of rebellious and self-centered twelve-year-old one might expect to complete this family picture. One day, Georges and Anne find a videotape left on their doorstep: it is an image of their town house filmed from across the street. People and cars pass by but the camera does not track them. Other similar tapes follow, the more frightening for accompanying the childlike drawing of a face with blood gushing from its mouth. Obsessively intent on having the tapes respond to his scrutiny (a little like the photographer in Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-up* [1966]), Georges calls the police only after the arrival of the second one, but finds they can do nothing since there has been no attack. He is now more determined than ever to fathom the significance of the cassettes.

These do yield a couple of clues. One leads Georges to the farmhouse of his youth where his mother still lives, awakening in him long-buried memories of a childhood companion, a young Algerian boy who, presumably at Georges's instigation, was forcibly taken away from the family farm where the child's parents had worked. Georges now suspects he knows the identity of the video-stalker, but unsure, though suffering the first pangs of guilt, refuses to confide in Anne, adding to the tape-inflicted strains that are starting to affect the couple. In response to a second clue, a dimly identified street name, Georges tracks down Majid (Maurice Bénichou), his boyhood friend, to the tenement where the middle-aged man now lives. Majid tells Georges he had been expecting him and is pleased he has finally come. But Georges believes the tapes are Majid's revenge for what happened when they were children and asks him with rising hostility how he wants that vengeance discharged. Majid wants nothing and denies having knowledge of any tapes. That he is telling the truth is evident from his tears when Georges has left—a moment when we are made intensely aware of his loneliness. Seemingly desperate that he cannot find a bridge between himself and his increasingly belligerent interlocutor ("terrorize my family and you'll get it!"), Majid slits his own throat during Georges's second visit.

The tapes are strange moments dropped into the narrative—moments that are sometimes objective, as when the spectator becomes a participant in the action while he and Georges are seeing the same image (as opposed to the unidimensional use of the screened image in Haneke's first pictures). It is through these images that Georges picks up most of his clues. But the narrative supplies its own clues and these are for only the spectator. When an already overwrought Georges is nearly run down by a cyclist as he is about to cross the street, the incident unleashes the same kind of violent anger in him that Majid will later provoke. While the tapes have clearly set Georges on edge, his anger is also inflected by the television that seems always to be on in the Laurents' apartment (no one ever appears to turn the set off in most of Haneke's films) with its constant scenes of social unrest and violence. The street confrontation ends only when the cyclist, a muscular black man, becomes abusive in turn and a fearful Anne steps in. After the suicide, another dark man of considerable size, Majid's son (Walid Afkir), encounters Georges, but his hostility culminates in telling Georges he merely wanted to see what a guilty man looks like. Neither Majid's son nor the police pursue the matter of Majid's death and the picture ends without having done so either.

Hidden opens with a front view of the Laurents' town house. Only after this single take lasting nearly three minutes are we made aware that we were not *outside* the house but *inside* the Laurents' television room, looking with them at the first tape. This jarring awareness affords the spectator a vision of *both* the tape and



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Screen violence in *Benny's Video*

the story that contains it. Later, the film audience will be allowed to see tapes that Georges does not see, Haneke becoming the spectator's own video-stalker. These objective moments periodically propel the spectator out of the fiction, as, for example, when the narrative camera is suddenly fixed on the student-crowded front steps leading into Pierrot's school.

The strongest distancing from the fiction occurs during Majid's suicide. It happens in front of Georges and appears to be his view of the incident. But then the scene is repeated as the frame takes in Georges standing between Majid and an invisible camera. At that moment, the spectator is expelled from Georges's subjective vision—the vision from which the narrative flowed—in order to witness a *filmed* event, fictional continuity being compromised as the camera calls attention to itself through its repositioning in order to shoot the scene again.

These repeated impediments to the spectator's acceptance of a simple narrative—refinements of the Brechtian technique seen in *Funny Games*—and the film's refusal to provide final answers to the mystery suggested by the narrative (as the genre requires), led a number of American critics and spectators to look for *Hidden*'s subtext. Some concluded that Haneke was examining the process of memory and repression in order to make a social statement about France's colonial past and its vestigial racism, themes he had already broached in *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* or *Code Unknown*). Others, like *The New York Times*'s A. O. Scott focused on alienation and urban angst, noting the picture's "Hitchcockian juncture at which voyeurism intersects with paranoia"; and while not overlooking the social message, Scott placed it in the context of the director's concern with "the depravity, violence and sheer moral ugliness that lurks beneath [modern man's] comfort and complacency."

In Haneke's French period, he moved from examining more generalized instances of cultural failure, or barely comprehensible consequences of that failure, to the examination of its effects through a particular event or neurosis, thus offering the spectator an *explanation*. *The Time of the Wolf* was, to a certain extent, a recasting of *Funny Games*, but he eliminated the gratuitous cruelty of the intruders by turning them into squatters occupying a private country retreat in order to escape from an undefined catastrophe (a dramatic form of glaciation?). Although the message and consequences remained the same, the spectator was given a reason for them.

In his second French picture, *The Piano Teacher*, Haneke showed the "moral ugliness" hiding behind a conventional mask by focusing on Erika (Isabelle Huppert), the distinguished musician teaching at a Viennese conservatory where, in spite of her rigorous exigency, she is much sought after. Hers is, however, the middle-class façade that Haneke will go about breaking down systematically to reveal Erika's world of sexual desperation that feeds on perverse fantasies and grim sado-masochism. It internalizes the sadistic violence of *Funny Games,* but, just as in that picture, the aberration affects and tinctures the world around her. But where Haneke's Austrian period showed the despair eventually bursting through the bourgeois overlay in order to indict an entire culture, Erika's mask, like Georges's, remains largely the micro-examination of a single individual. The less idiosyncratic characters of *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* and *Code Unknown* had allowed Haneke to tar society with a broader brush. The first's collage of vignettes showed the ordinary loneliness, banality, and despair of individuals, each cocooned within their private dreariness until their collective destinies converge at the moment of the nihilistic murder on which the picture opens. *Code Unknown* expanded these themes, stressing the racial problems that affect society: through the same disjunctive style as in *71 Fragments*, Haneke focused his social concerns on a young French African, Amadou (Ona Lu Yenke), teaching in a school for the deaf. A Romanian refugee Maria (Luminita Gheorghiu),

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Self-referentiality in *Funny Games*

who had entered France in the hope of finding a better life, is now reduced to begging. When she is provoked in the film's opening sequence by Jean (Alexandre Hamidi), one of the white characters, Amadou gets into an altercation with him. The police arrest Amadou and deport Maria.

In these earlier pictures, as he would throughout his career, Haneke used the camera to evidence what he showed through the way in which he showed it. The alienation of the wretched people in *71 Fragments* is emphasized by the blackouts that abruptly cut off and separate their scenes (a technique repeated in *Code Unknown*). In the same way as he would use it in *Hidden*, Haneke made extensive use of an unmoving camera, as when he positioned it for three minutes in front of a student returning ping-pong balls propelled by a machine—an aimless, mechanical action, a moment in the nihilistic void that will lead the young man to commit a murder as senseless as Benny's before killing himself. An even longer single take fixed on an elderly man at the telephone as we heard his meaningless monologue in what was supposed to be a conversation with his daughter.

Many of *Hidden*'s clues are thus embedded in the director's earlier work. His social concerns are plainly evident throughout *Hidden*: the spectator is *shown* Georges's recollection of young Majid brutally removed from the family farm in order to stress the sharpness of the memory. That memory is especially important since the youngster is an orphan, the loss of his parents alluding to the events of 1961 when Algerian demonstrators confronted the Paris police and many were killed, some of their bodies being dumped into the Seine. Georges's angry encounters with the passing cyclist, with Majid in his tenement, with the son of Majid, the despair of Majid that leads to his suicide, all echo Haneke's previous work: Georges's violent responses are like those of Jean, the brutal eviction of young Majid is like that of Maria and Amadou; the despair and suicide of Majid are brought on by the same rebuffs Amadou has suffered.

Such reactions involving blacks and whites show a lingering malaise induced by the French experience in Algeria: that malaise may be Jean's or Georges's but Haneke intends it to stand for a similar persistence in French consciousness, as the recollection of 1961 shows. The tapes and incidents are then meant, in the words of the *Los Angeles Times*'s Kevin Thomas, "to inflict [Georges] with a guilty conscience." That Majid should suddenly commit suicide would seem to be an overstatement (as might be Amadou's when he attacks Jean for having insulted Maria); but Majid's disappointment at finding an enemy when he had been hoping to find a friend is more understandable if it is seen as the cumulative desperation of those who were victims of France's colonial past.

TRANSCULTURAL INTERPRETATIONS

Though the reading of a subtext was encouraged by a film that left too many loose ends dangling in a way unbecoming any self-respecting mystery (from where or whom did the tapes come? what was their purpose?), and though both storyline and characters allow for an interpretation of postcolonial guilt, such an exclusive reading of *Hidden* fails to account for much of the picture's *form*. The use of extraneous moments when the camera is arrested before its object—moments whose length and seeming irrelevance periodically separate the spectator from the action—is more disturbing than it was in *71 Fragments* or *Code Unknown*, two pictures whose form was deliberately experimental and in which the device could often be seen as merely symbolic, with a clear message—that of emptiness, loneliness, or alienation. In *Hidden* they contrast a film whose experimental nature is masked by the apparent realism of a mystery drama. Symbolic interpretation is similarly resisted by the unaccountable *filming* of Georges's encounter with Majid (different from the "impossible"

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The beginning of *Hidden*

rewinding of the action in order to reverse it in *Funny Games*: the first is a narrative impossibility, the second is merely a filmmaker's trick), or the final long take of the entrance to Pierrot's school that mirrors the fixity of the film's opening scene. These intrusions, together with the film's failure to honor the mystery's implicit contract, secrete their own mystery. Its insolubility justifies the views of interpreters for whom Haneke intended mainly to create a psychological thriller whose open-endedness transfers it to the spectator's mind—in the words of Roger Ebert, a spectator "left feeling as the characters feel, uneasy, violated, spied upon, surrounded by faceless observers."

One or a combination of these two approaches allowed perceptive American critics to account for the film's refusal to be what it claimed to be. But others were less inclined to accept such interpretations, disappointed that a thriller should so thwart their expectations. When those critics remembered *Code Unknown*, they recalled that there too the episodic stories were a collage for which they could find no meaning or link, other than an undercurrent of unhappy resignation that seemed to rub off onto the film's audiences. For them, *Hidden* succeeded neither in its social nor in its psychological concerns. If they did note the social criticism, they felt that France's Algerian past was too parochial and foreign to elicit their interest, especially as it was contained in an inconclusive narrative—some even finding the film arcane and pretentious, the kind of meaninglessness that only intellectual snobs might claim to enjoy because they cannot admit that it is incomprehensible.

For those most alienated by the film, *Hidden* was simply a bad piece of work. Other than the evidence of a narrative that goes nowhere, they drew attention to technical errors due to carelessness. They pointed out, for example, that in the second tape (night shot) car headlights project the shadow of the camera onto a foregrounded tree. Worse yet, that shadow is seen again after Georges rewinds the tape for another examination.

Spotting what they saw as technical lapses might have pointed these critics in an entirely different direction, as might have Haneke's words at the Cannes press conference: "I greatly doubt that a person can have an idea of the truth from watching a film. I always say that a feature film is twenty-four lies per second." This invitation to the spectator not to seek his "truth" in the story narrated by the film suggests that he should seek it in the film itself—in the fact that he is *looking at* a film. This injunction is not unfamiliar to European audiences since at least Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*; but there is also another sense in which both cultures differed from the start in their use of, and response to, the film, Americans trying to turn the film into a *transparency*, lessening as much as possible its interposition between spectator and filmic narrative, while the French were never averse to preserving the film's *opacity*, the statement that the spectator was seeing a *film* rather than an *action*. When Godard deliberately alters film stock or allows the bumpiness of a tracking shot to remain unedited, he is striving for the same distancing, as is Antonioni, when, in *Blow-up*, he forces his spectator and Thomas (David Hemmings), his fictional photographer, to seek an increasingly elusive truth in the ever-greater magnification of the same picture. Seen in this perspective, the shadow of the camera projected by the car's headlights (twice) would not be a lack of directional care but a deliberate desire to stress the role of the camera.

The American desire for explanation, for unambiguous narrative, or at most for a narrative whose ambiguity is an oscillation between understandable realities, contrasts European acceptance (and in particular French acceptance) of a play or film whose main interest is in its form or mood rather than in its content. These divergent views may derive in part from the divergent paths that motion pictures followed on both

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Georges and Majid in *Hidden*

continents from nearly the time of their birth: the French film was often intended as an oneiric experience while the American usually privileged the telling of a story, a difference clearly shown in the different uses of the medium by someone like Edwin S. Porter in America, and Georges Méliès in France. Porter mastered the problems of continuity, using crosscutting, superimpositions, fades, and dissolves, in order to create a twelve-minute epic, *The Great Train Robbery* (1903), the first Western, with its hold-up, its posse, its chase, and its showdown.

But when Porter's need to perfect his narrative skill involved camera tricks—the way in which the camera *saw*, as through fades and dissolves—he availed himself of manipulations previously used by Méliès. The latter was a stage illusionist for whom the new medium was a way to enhance the make-believe of his boards, preserving some of the mystery and awe that motion pictures had so recently induced in spectators. For Méliès, the film was primarily an adjunct to help project the theater audience into a surreal and fantastic world. In Méliès's best-known film, *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), he did not abandon the illusionist's world but transferred it to a motion picture in which live actors and cartoon figures were caught up in a fantastic voyage into space.

In the United States, the initial wonder of motion pictures dissipated much more quickly and technical ingenuity as well as directorial imagination generally strove for ever-more perfect realism to enhance the film narrative. Furthermore, American films reversed the law of economics according to which a product first comes on the market for the benefit of the upper economic strata and only gradually filters down to the lower ones. Since motion pictures were silent, they provided accessible entertainment for a huge population of recent immigrants who had not yet mastered the language. From the start, American cinema thus catered to a mass market; films were shown in every kind of available venue to accommodate ever-growing audiences whose taste for readily felt emotions and suspenseful adventure shaped a large part of the industry's production (the situation was somewhat different in France where films were soon granted the bourgeois dignity of regular theaters, and where, by 1908, a company called Le Film d'art had bridged the distance between the two forms through the simple expedient of training its cameras on famous actors in their original stage roles). Additionally, American puritanism could result in self-imposed or externally imposed censorship, adding to the economic imperatives that limited the freedom of U.S. filmmakers to depart from what eventually became widely accepted norms.

While it would be an overgeneralization to suggest these historical divergences are largely responsible for differences in cultural taste, they do help explain the greater width of the American mainstream when compared to the French. The popularity of Bernard Pivot's *Bouillon de culture* series devoted to a discussion of books, and the fact that they remain a sufficiently familiar reference to locate Georges professionally, show the French willingness to accept a broader spectrum of what is defined as television entertainment, even though Haneke still wishes to show that culture does not necessarily dissipate prejudice, and that even a cultural overlay does not always inhibit the overbearing intrusion of stultifying images.

THE ENDING OF *HIDDEN*

Finally, it is *Hidden*'s *camera* that tells us about collective and individual guilt, *not* the narrative, because Haneke has placed no mediator between us and his lens. It is the camera that is watching, that is telling Georges he is being watched, that allows us to watch alongside it, that tells us, as we become self-conscious viewers of the film, that we too are being watched (hence Roger Ebert's feeling that we feel, as the characters do, uneasy, violated, spied upon). Its centrality is constantly evidenced, from the opening moment when what seemed to be the start of a narrative becomes suddenly an object within the narrative. Similarly, only the

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The ending of *Hidden*

camera can account for Georges's second viewing of Majid's suicide since other than Georges there is no one to witness it. But rather than accept this and other implausibilities as simply the recording by a camera—a camera that for all its obviousness remains *hidden*—a large number of American spectators either attempted to find ingenious if illogical reasons for these impossibilities or threw up their hands in frustration.

European filmgoers had learned at least as early as *71 Fragments* or *Code Unknown* (both seldom seen in this country) to expect the deliberate assertion of Haneke's camera, whether from consciously stressing its vantage point (as in separate moments shot from the same unusual angle), the overly long and utterly static takes, the seeming irrelevancy and randomness of individual scenes. Judging from *Hidden*'s failure over here to match European acclaim, American filmgoers with this knowledge seemed more likely to use it as a reason to avoid the picture.

Hidden thus allows two readings: that of a morality tale concerned with the effects of racism, and that of a Brechtian exercise in distancing. These two readings are linked since the second is necessary to an understanding of the first, short of which the spectator is either left groping for a conclusion the film does not provide, or sees an inconclusive and unsatisfying narration that requires his elucidation and shunts him away from the narrative. As a result, the film loses the refractory spectator and forces the one favorably inclined into a close and constant examination of the images. For the latter, Haneke has provided an ending that can be seen both as hopeful and as an expansion of the conflicts previously shown.

Hidden's final scene is the second time the immobile camera has been trained on the front steps before Pierrot's school and their milling crowd. By now, the sensitized eye has grown accustomed to scrutinizing those living freeze frames with especial care and will notice in the crowd Majid's son coming towards Pierrot and talking to him. They appear to know each other although we have never been given any reason to think that they might. What we do know by now is that these two sons are unlike their fathers. Pierrot is a rebellious youngster: he has already once spent a night away from home without telling his parents, putting them in fear of a kidnap and adding to their paranoia. His hostility towards his father draws him towards his mother, causing him to feel betrayed by Anne and to turn violently on her when he believes she is having an affair. Although no such generational conflict is shown separating Majid from his son, we know they are utterly different. Majid's son belongs to the younger generation. Unlike his father, he is not resigned to postcolonial humiliation and openly confronts Georges with his guilt.

This generational gap is what allows the sons to do what their fathers could not: they are able to talk to each other (it is even possible that Pierrot disappeared from his home that night in order to be with Majid's son). The killing of the father by each of them may mean the burial of old antagonisms. It is on this shot that *Hidden* ends—a note one would never have expected of Haneke in his Austrian period.

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ABSTRACT Michael Haneke's career began with harsh, alienating, and self-referential works concerned with violence and social hypocrisy. His later work, especially *Hidden* (2005), which explores racism in France, is both less disconcerting and more hopeful. This article shows how Haneke's formal strategies, which exasperated some U.S. critics, illuminate his themes.

KEYWORDS Haneke, *Hidden*, Austrian cinema, postcolonial cinema, Brechtian cinema

■ KEVIN ESCH

"What is your favorite word?"

Myth and Method *Inside the Actors Studio*

Photo: John Clifford. © Bravo

Inside the Actors Studio: James Lipton (left) and Al Pacino

The show is part of a long history of the televisual dissemination of artistic and intellectual discourse, complicating the common perception of TV as low culture.

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IN HIS IDIOSYNCRATIC ESSAY "Dialogues of the Living Dead," John O. Thompson compares TV talk shows to an ancient literary genre wherein famous figures from the past—Machiavelli and Julius Caesar, for example, or Lucian of Samosota's second century A.D. exchange between Diogenes and Alexander, or Socrates, Billy the Kid, and Abraham Lincoln in *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* (1989)—engage in imaginary conversation. The fascination of the genre, Thompson suggests, depends on the reader already knowing the acts and ideas of the subjects and their place in history. With that history established, however, little opportunity exists to gain fresh insight about the speakers; "what makes the Dialogues of the Dead so unsatisfactory," says Thompson, "is that the dead become puppets, simulacra speaking to the writer's point . . . [E]ven in cases where [such] meetings would have been possible, we know from experience that in actual conversation nothing essential need be said, nothing that really illuminates why the famous people interest us, why what they stand for is pertinent to us."[1] This, Thompson argues, is also the disposable nature of the talk-show format, in which actors and other celebrities share banal anecdotes, tell unthreatening jokes, and in general simply reconfirm what we think we already know about them and what they do.

Inside the Actors Studio (henceforth *ITAS*) purports to be something radically different in an American media landscape devoted more to displaying screen performers in the shop window of the marketplace than to understanding them as artisans. If that sounds unduly flattering, I intend it to be, for undue flattery defines host James Lipton's approach on his cable television program, where Lipton interviews celebrity actors at length about the nature and practice of their craft. Numerous critics note that flattery seems to be essential to the elucidation of the actor's craft on the show: "lavish praise" is the means by which "[r]eticent and acerbic artists" are roused to discuss their art "with fervor and vulnerability."[2] As a result, Lipton himself has become a cultural figure subject to analysis, parody, and revilement in the press, in comedy routines, and on the Internet.

Thompson's "dialogue with the dead" metaphor still applies to *ITAS* in two senses, however. First, the various actors and directors (and occasionally singers, playwrights, and comedians) that appear on the show are treated with the reverence due one who will some day be dead, and whose thoughts will be preserved in the episode archives. Second, the show's guests are implicitly participating in a dialogue with all those who have preceded them, and the host makes much of the connections from guest to guest, creating a network of biographical themes and artistic approaches that (conceivably) can be studied by future generations. Furthermore, featured guests implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, partake in a dialogue with the mythology of the Actors Studio and a lineage of famous Method actors. The show expressly wishes to extend and contribute to that mythology of American acting culture.

Paradoxically, however, the actors who are interviewed on *ITAS* are made to reveal themselves as artistic individuals precisely through discussing the craft that has led to their commodification as celebrities. The Actors Studio has long been mythically linked to this contradiction between art and commerce, with one foot in the world of New York theater and the other in Hollywood. Since its formation, the Studio has had a divisive and often antagonistic attitude toward Hollywood celebrity.[3] This conflict between stage and screen, privacy and publicity, continued in 1994 with the Actors Studio's expansion into a university-approved MFA program, the Actors Studio Drama School, in cooperation with New School University. The tension has only grown as *ITAS* has turned from a little-watched cable show to a major marketing venue, and as, not coincidentally, its host channel Bravo has become part of the NBC-Universal conglomerate.

In the following pages I argue that the persistent conflict on *ITAS* stems from the two different understandings of Thompson's dialogues with the dead—one counterfeit, unenlightening, and serving only the immediate gratification of the show and its corporate overseers; the other authentic, exploratory, transcendent, and historically vital. Central to my analysis of the show are the ways in which it struggles to preserve a high-minded mythology of film acting, exemplified by the original, nostalgized Actors Studio and challenged by the consumerist priorities of the late capitalist Hollywood industry. This negotiation happens in the show on two levels: first, in its orientation to the talk-show genre, and second, through the function and impact of its host James Lipton, whose own performance complicates the show's performative discourse. Ultimately I offer the possibility that the show, rather than simply engaging with the history of Hollywood acting culture, is in fact a means of telling that history. *ITAS* challenges its critics' standard, perhaps cynical interpretations and offers its own form of mythic renewal.

INSIDE THE ACTORS STUDIO AS TALK SHOW

James Lipton pales at the idea that *ITAS* is a talk show, and prefers to call it a "classroom." The show originated in 1994 when Lipton, then dean of students of the Actors Studio Drama School, convinced the nascent Bravo cable channel to tape the school's MFA guest seminars (since 2005 the ASDS is no longer affiliated with the

New School, and the show now tapes at Pace University). While there are often friends and associates of the guest in the audience, the majority of attendees consist of acting, directing, and playwriting students. Thus, the show's title is somewhat misleading: while we are given an "inside" glimpse of some Actors Studio members (though guests increasingly have no connection to the Studio), the show takes place in a university auditorium. The original Actors Studio, which is still operating as an invitation-only workshop for working actors, is elsewhere in Manhattan.

Lipton's emphasis on the educational origins of the show, like his description of the show's "legacy," suggests that the cultural aspirations of *ITAS* are far higher than a "mere" talk show. Others would seem to agree, for the show is rarely discussed as part of the genre, even though it has won several cable industry awards for best talk show. In Robert J. Erler's ninety-nine-page appendix to *Television Talk: A History of the TV Talk Show*—a highly inclusive listing that contains, among other examples, *What's My Line*, *Meet the Press*, and Jerry Lewis's Muscular Dystrophy telethon—*ITAS* is nowhere to be found.[4] Magazine and newspaper articles tend to describe it as a type of "interview show" as much as a talk show, a distinction that is never clarified. The difference, if there is one, may lie in the striving for timelessness, rather than the typical talk show's timeliness, that the show and its host exude. The disposable promotionality of the talk show, the most economical and hence ubiquitous of television formats and an ideal template for privileging consumption, is what *ITAS* formally and thematically rebels against. As Lipton puts it, the show "is meant as an antidote to what is normally done with these people."[5]

Much of the success of the show can be traced to its product differentiation within the conventions of the talk-show format. Even for a talk show, *ITAS* is rigid in its construction. The show begins with soothing synthesizer theme music by composer Angelo Badalamenti, reminiscent of his tranquil scoring of the David Lynch television show *Twin Peaks* and far removed from the dynamic themes that introduce other talk shows. Accompanying the music is a smoothly dissolving succession of images: in earlier episodes, shots of star Actors Studio pupils such as James Dean and Montgomery Clift mingled with clips of some of the show's well-known interview subjects, from Tom Hanks to Steven Spielberg to Julia Roberts; more recently, visual references to first-generation Method actors have disappeared. The screen then fades to black as a title card appears, announcing the guest for that installment. It's worth noting that, again unlike all other talk shows, *ITAS* has no repeat guests, no recurring forced encounters between the host and the actress with a new movie coming out. The format of the show strongly suggests that once the guest has made his contribution to the archive, no reprises are needed; artistic posterity has been served. In this and other ways the show tries to divorce itself from the feeling that, however charming and enjoyable, the guest of honor is only a product, available everywhere soon (again).

The standard talk show's ostensible purpose, despite its barely suppressed financial motivations, is to entertain the viewer with casual conversation. To minimize conversational and financial risk as much as possible, talk-show encounters are highly disciplined affairs. The object of this management is to suppress real, unexpected (and thus threatening) developments in the conversation. For all its purported focus on talk, the late-night talk show (and to a lesser extent daytime talk shows such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and *Ellen*) actually fears the potential disruptions that can result from actual conversation—or, worse, the absence of it. Jay Rosen has described this "terror of conversation":

> Just below the surface of the polite conversation and friendly joking is the threat that, after sitting down, the guest and host will have nothing to say. The talk show magnifies the terror of that awkward moment when conversation begins (or falters), something that everyone in the audience has felt. In a way this is the "plot" of every talk show: A series of guests arrive, each creating a potentially awkward social situation that must be managed smoothly. The skill of the host in diffusing the tension is one of the pleasures the viewer is offered.[6]

For *ITAS*, while the awkwardness of the situation remains, and is in some ways exacerbated by the show's host (a point I'll take up later), a number of factors ensure that rote anecdotes and waning dialogue are kept at bay. First, since the show began as a masterclass for MFA students, guests have ostensibly been invited because, in addition to being successful in the industry, they are thought to have something to say about excellence in acting craft and industry success. Second, the *This is Your Life* nature of the exchanges seeks to guarantee that the conversational terrain will be unlike that of other shows. The talk show's generic response to its own fear of conversation is the elimination of surprise and the reinforcement of viewer expectations. The same celebrity stories will be trotted out, the same carefully manicured personal history maintained; conversational talking points will be prearranged and strictly adhered to. By contrast, *ITAS* makes a point of the extensive research the host literally and figuratively per-

forms regarding his subjects. James Lipton often mentions in interviews that his guests register awe and alarm at his prodigious stack of blue note-cards, which Lipton consults throughout the interview; one observer wonders whether in fact the cards, which have "a humming, alien-obelisk life of their own," are not the show's true protagonist.[7]

Despite the rich detail of the show's recollections of its guests' lives and work, the tone of the proceedings is considerably more therapeutic than journalistic. The environment of *ITAS*—whether it is the auditorium filled with eager young actors, or the final edit approval that Lipton grants to his guests—spurs guests repeatedly to moments of unbidden self-revelation: numerous guests have broken into tears on the show, including Spike Lee and Ed Harris, and Jack Lemmon for the first time publicly revealed his alcoholism. The show can even boast a voluble session with Robert De Niro, a notoriously reticent interview subject. In its therapeutic nature the show bears its closest resemblance to the prevailing talk-show formats. Many have commented on the trend towards therapy in daytime talk shows such as those of Phil Donahue, Oprah Winfrey, and Sally Jesse Raphael. Paolo Carpignano and his colleagues oppose the talk show's ritualized testimonials to the informative, cognitive purpose of television news (even as they assert that the dividing line between the two has vanished).[8] Janice Peck, in her work on the use of autobiography in daytime talk, describes the open-endedness of these therapeutic exchanges as "the programs' internal contradiction: they address social conflicts that can never be fully resolved on television while holding out the possibility that talking will lead to, or is itself a form of, resolution."[9]

This trend in talk-show discourse also relies heavily on the audience, both in the studio and at home, as part of its ritual exchange. Historically the audience has played little active part in the talk-show dynamic; *The Phil Donahue Show*, however, made the host's forays into the audience commonplace, to the point where interviews were actually conducted from amid the audience. While *ITAS* does not achieve that level of interactivity, during the interview the camera regularly cuts away to reaction shots of the students, and James Lipton often turns in a conspiratorial aside to his class to note the return of a recurring series theme, or deflects the guest's modesty with a flattering remark, shared with the audience ("I think," he will say, "we would disagree with you"). In the final segment of the show Lipton and his guest descend from the stage of the auditorium to sit in front of the class and field questions. The questions are similar from one show to the next. How do you approach a difficult scene? What kept

Photo: Virginia Sherwood. © Bravo

Photo: Barbara Nitke. © Bravo

Photo: Virginia Sherwood. © Bravo

Photo: Virginia Sherwood. © Bravo

Inside the Actors Studio, from top: James Lipton interviews Terri Hatcher, Forest Whitaker, Matt Damon, and Chris Rock

you going through the early years? The consistency of the questions from show to show emphasizes one irresolvable conflict of the show, namely, the disparity between artistic and commercial success. The fact that the guest actor moves down among the students actually serves to heighten the disparity between the celebrity's achievements and most of the aspiring actors' professional futures.

As a highly ritualized discussion among actors about acting, *ITAS* hopes to preserve its lessons by handing them down to the next generation of performers. The format and economics of the talk show, however, to which the show owes much of its success even as it struggles against them, constantly threaten to reduce the archive to disposable, mass-cultural information. In his essay "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin discusses "the nature of true storytelling." Storytelling has been diminished in the modern age, in large part because of modern media's massive dissemination of information. "The value of information," he writes, "does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time."[10] In this way talk, an economic medium that is also for actors the medium of their own mythology, serves two contradictory masters.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

On the website jumptheshark.com, a forum for determining the moments when television series have exhausted their credibility, a list of key events in the history of *ITAS* places "James Lipton's ego" in first place by a large margin of voters. For these viewers, *ITAS* "jumped the shark"—the reference is to an old episode of *Happy Days*—from the outset by having an interviewer like Lipton, who lacks most of the qualities that make up a typical talk-show host. "Like most people who are on television for many hours," Jay Rosen writes, "the host of a talk show must be someone who is not threatening to the audience, who has no rough edges or strong traits that might offend someone or become grating over time . . . They have no accents or quirks in their speech . . . Their function is to be in the middle, in all possible senses of the term."[11] James Lipton falls so far outside this understanding of the host role that for many viewers the show becomes as much about him as his guests. Lipton is a polarizing, eccentric figure whose performance of sophistication and dramatic earnestness leaves the show open to ridicule and parody, and which itself becomes part of the show's discourse of performance.

The earnestness of *ITAS* and Lipton has everything to do with the show's stated objective—putting the craft back into conversation with actors on television, thereby correcting, as Lipton says, "what is normally done with these people." By doing so, the show is part of a long history of the televisual dissemination of artistic and intellectual discourse, complicating the common perception of TV as low culture. Lynn Spigel has written about television's use of modern art during the American post-war period, arguing that it was part of a project to distinguish American art from a dominant European modernism and to embrace American modern art as unapologetically commercial. Hence, the Pop Art movement of the 1960s found expression in the *Batman* TV series, with its splashy iconography and comics-like visual effects; Andy Warhol attended the series premiere at a New York discotheque.[12]

The talk-show genre, the apotheosis of television's financial imperative, has also occasionally attempted to elevate its discourse and approach art, film, politics, philosophy, and other subjects in uncommon depth. Charlie Rose, host of his eponymous PBS show, would be a good contemporary example. Maybe the most engaging, and popular, instance is Dick Cavett, who had a short-lived daytime talk show in the late 1960s and whom ABC then picked to battle Johnny Carson in the late-night slot in the early 1970s. He quickly gained a reputation for daring, intelligent discussions with a wide variety of guests. Often guests were paired eccentrically, in a rebuke to high, low, and mid-cultural divides: Groucho Marx and Truman Capote, for example, or Debbie Reynolds and Sly Stone, or Gore Vidal, Norman Mailer, and Janet Flanner. *Time* wrote that the show had "the best mixture of literate repartee, information, entertainment and urbane wit to be found on late-night television," and Cavett, whose comic bits often included the incompatibility of his Nebraska roots and Yale education, clearly reveled in blending mass and elite appeals.[13] After a columnist suggested that he should try to broaden his audience, Cavett quipped on air that his solution would be to "bring on a fat Columbia University professor and make him dance by shooting at his feet."[14]

An even more eccentric case—but which goes to my central point here—is Steve Allen's PBS series *Meeting of Minds*, which ran from 1976 to 1981. Allen, a long-time talk-show host who in his later years became more famous for railing against the dumbing-down of mass culture, and who said television was "junk food for the mind," developed and wrote the scripts for the show. Clearly a version of the "dialogues of the dead," the show featured Allen moderating wide-ranging discussions among famous historical figures as played by

actors, such as one episode which featured Karl Marx, Thomas More, Ulysses S. Grant, and Marie Antoinette. Though the show won a Peabody award for broadcast excellence and several other honors, it also suffered from the predictable problems of its talk-show format and the medium.

One sympathetic historian, participating in a colloquium with Allen and other historians on the benefits and challenges the show presents, dwells on a vital issue of performance in the show. After remarking on the talk-show format as "a device of trivialization," he ponders the effect of using such a format for the show's intellectual exchanges:

> It seems to me the effect is, above all, and by definition, to bring those historic characters down to our own pygmy size, to put them in a context in which we look for little idiosyncrasies, bits of body language, and the rest. So the casting with which Steve Allen had such great difficulty—and in which he succeeded so well—disserves the ideas that are being presented, *precisely insofar as the actor is compelling in his presentation of those ideas* [my italics].[15]

In essence, the mixture of high and low cultures resides not merely in the tensions between the host's ambitions, the televisual medium, and the talk-show format, but in the tension deriving from performance itself. The realm of sophisticated ideas (however compromised) in *Meeting of Minds* is challenged to the extent that the performances encourage us to see Karl Marx, et al., as real characters. By the same token, James Lipton, undeniably a real character, forces us to consider his performance of sophistication as much as—and as a component of—what *ITAS* has to tell us about acting.

Joseph Litvak reminds us in the introduction to his book *Strange Gourmets: Sophistication, Theory, and the Novel* that, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *sophistication* is actually synonymous with *perversion.* In teasing out the etymology of the word, its close relation to *corruption* and *adulteration* as well as its antonym *naturalness*, and trying to reconcile that denotative past with the word's more positive current connotations, he concludes, "It is not so much that the meaning of the term shifts from negative to positive as that the negative meaning *persists* within the positive, with the result that even the most celebratory invocations of sophistication as worldliness remain haunted by the guilty sense of sophistication as a deviation from, even a crime against, nature."[16] In his perversion of any semblance of naturalness, then, James Lipton's performance on *ITAS* is the essence of sophistication as the bad-object-within-the-good. Aside from (but also in league with) his sycophancy, his highly dramatic, oracular delivery is most frequently remarked on by observers. Andrew Corsello of *GQ* submits that "[Lipton's] readings often feel more like proclamations than questions, every letter of the word capitalized—and aimed not at the guest, or even at the audience, but at the vaulted space of the auditorium"—after which he proves his point by transcribing two Liptonian exchanges as if Lipton were John Irving's Owen Meany.[17] Even more acidly, Sarah Vowell of *Salon* writes, "Lipton also relishes that part of an interview . . . when he arrives at the actor's breakthrough role. He looks deep into Willem Dafoe's eyes, pauses, glares at the audience, and quietly, theatrically, understates something like, 'And then. You did a little film called . . . *Platoon.*' Insert wild audience applause here. I like to imagine him interviewing God, getting past the Chaos portion of His career and lingering over the line, 'And then. You created a little planet called . . . Earth.'"[18]

Yet in most descriptions of Lipton and the show there is also a reversal, an acknowledgment of sophistication framed within perversion. Lipton is incredibly pretentious and unctuous, and yet he elicits thoughtful and insightful conversation on the nature of acting; he's "unlikable on so many levels" and yet he reminds us "why we should care about art in the first place."[19] This ambivalence addresses the profound tension between performance style and performance discussion that often make *ITAS* uncomfortable to watch, especially given its association with the Actors Studio. Like an antithesis to the many Studio members or alumni that have appeared on the show, Lipton, described by one stand-up comic as having "the stench of the failed actor wafting off him,"[20] seems to heighten through counter-example the studied grace and naturalness of his subjects.

FLATTERY AND FANCY WORDS

The continual juxtaposition on *ITAS* of these two modes of performance seems to repeatedly prompt one question from viewers, a question echoing Litvak: *who does he think he is?* Litvak asks the question of himself while researching his book—*who do you think you are?* In partial response to his own sense of discomfort, he realizes that "sophistication, suddenly, weirdly resembling the body odor or the bad breath that it presumably banishes from its kingdom, *causes embarrassment*" (italics in original).[21] I believe the discomfort or equivocal unease which many (myself included) feel while watching *ITAS* manifests in this frequently asked question. Often, the question would appear to be based in honest confusion, some wondering what position Lipton holds which allows him to host the show. Many Internet newsgroup discussants ask what James Lipton has done in

the past, what his affiliation is with the Actors Studio, if any, and what his interviewing credentials are.

Other spectators more directly question just *what he is doing* on the show, as when Andrew Corsello comments on Lipton's stentorian delivery and muses, "A viewer wonders: Who does this guy think he is—a proctor administering a midterm? . . . Are he and his guest staging some act of high-concept performance art?"[22] Implicit in Corsello's second inquiry is the belief, even the hope that Lipton cannot possibly be as unaware, as devoid of irony, as he would appear to be about his performance. Here the question, *who does he think he is?* assumes new meaning, as it begins to suggest Susan Sontag's germinal division between two "camps," "either completely naïve or else wholly conscious." For Sontag, the "essential element" of naïve camp, or what might more properly be called kitsch, "is seriousness, a seriousness that fails . . . [and] which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve."[23] But I don't wish to belabor the obvious, though multifaceted, kitsch of *ITAS*, except to say that it brings us back to its conflicted expression of taste and sophistication, a simultaneous disavowal and unwitting affirmation of celebrity culture.

One of the most remarkable ways the show fortifies its appeal to taste and sophistication is its continual focus on orality as an expression of taste. Litvak writes, following Bourdieu, about the intimate connections between culinary taste and aesthetic taste, and suggests this link demonstrates the importance of the mouth to sophistication, en route to an elaboration of the homosexual politics of sophistication.[24] I wish to broaden Litvak's conception of the oral as it relates to taste, extending it to the mouth's production of language, and the pleasure one can physically take from the creation of words. On his show James Lipton emphasizes this kind of oral sophistication. Much of *ITAS* revolves around the pleasure Lipton appears to gain from his heightened physical play with language. In this he again resembles Dick Cavett, a similarly short man with an unlikely deep, resonant voice. Cavett was often cited for his extraordinary facility with words, from which the quick wit and frequent punning on his shows derived. "In an age when speech is the most debased of currencies," says a representative *New Yorker* profile, "when public men utter a thin, flatulent gruel of soothing generalities cooked up by other hands, when entertainers fall back on 'great' and 'wonderful' to avoid the pain of characterizing a place, a person, or a performance, Cavett make the effort to speak for himself, to eschew clichés and formulas."[25]

For his part, Lipton rarely puns, or even jokes at all, and his persona lends itself more to preternatural stillness than quickness. Yet though he may pretend, as he does when effusing over one of Susan Sarandon's films, that he "doesn't mean to sound fancy," the sounds of fanciness (in its generic and homosexually suggestive meanings) are intrinsic to his performance, as they were to Cavett's.[26] An essential part of Lipton's sophisticated style—and the contradictory responses it engenders—is the almost culinary enthusiasm of his delivery. Corsello describes the playful orality of Lipton's words, "frequently italicized and elongated when he wishes to share how ab-so-*lute*-ly de-*li*-cious he finds this or that morsel."[27] In fact, observations on his uncritical adulation of his interview subjects often teeter on the homoerotic, if not the openly homophobic: most often people revile Lipton as an "ass-kisser," but some also remark how he "gushes over" his guests,[28] and Corsello disregards the equally excessive flattery of a European review of the show as "French ejaculations."[29]

Photo: Elizabeth M. Claffey. © NBC Universal Photo

James Lipton dances with Horny Manatee on *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*

The theme all these variations represent is the perception that flattery—or more accurately, the performance of flattery—is effeminate. Richard Stengel writes in *You're Too Kind: A Brief History of Flattery* that this view has been long established in American letters. D. H. Lawrence described the typical Hemingway protagonist as one who "doesn't love anybody, and it nauseates him to pretend he does,"[30] whereas for Emerson, "Flattery is effeminate in part because truth is hard and straight, while flattery is soft and bent."[31] While Hemingway's heroes cannot say *I love you*, the egregious flatterer cannot stop saying it, causing embarrassment in the same moment as he ingratiates himself. As Barthes suggested, *I love you* is a demand for reciprocation, and in the interview relationship the love is necessarily one-way.[32] Thus the subject's embarrassment often adds to the viewer's already considerable discomfort, for we recognize that Lipton's compliments will not, indeed cannot, be returned in kind.

Lipton's flattery and sophistication reach their zenith through his ritual performance of Bernard

Pivot's adaptation of the famous Proust questionnaire (named after its most celebrated respondent), with which Pivot has concluded his renowned French talk shows, *Apostrophe* and *Bouillon de culture*. The show's Francophilia is evident: Lipton has expressed in interviews his indebtedness to Pivot's shows as a model of intelligent dialogue, and Pivot returned the compliment by inviting Lipton to be one of his final guests on *Bouillon de culture*. In 2002 *ITAS* even shot two episodes at the Opéra Comique in Paris (where the show has a loyal following) with French actresses Juliette Binoche and Jeanne Moreau.[33]

The sophistication of the questionnaire segment lies partly in Lipton's elongated, tongue-rolling French pronunciation, which often elicits from the interview subject what Sarah Vowell calls the "can-you-believe-this-guy glance into the crowd."[34] The questions themselves often reinforce this focus on orality that I've argued is the show's primary route to sophistication.[35] The first question, "What is your favorite word?", Lipton always asks with especial introductory gravitas. To ask his subjects *to speak* their favorite word allows them to satisfy their oral desire—and some subjects (those quick enough to avoid the clichés like *yes* and *love*) indeed choose words which less represent ideas they cherish than words they appear physically to enjoy saying. Many of these type tend toward the multisyllabic, exotic, or pretentious: Sigourney Weaver's is *la folie*, Richard Dreyfuss goes with *egregious*, Gabriel Byrne chooses *prolix*, and Ned Beatty and Ellen Barkin both select *serendipity*. Eliciting answers from the opposite end of the spectrum is the question "What is your favorite curse word?" This question seems equally indebted, however, to the air of sophistication the show tries to promote. Given that the show's network bleeps any "offensive" words, the subjects (and even, occasionally, Lipton himself) are allowed a certain risqué freedom to say whatever they want, to revel in the filth that issues from their mouths. The perversity of taste, tasteful perversity, again reveals itself within sophistication.

For all these reasons—the earnestness, the sycophancy, the Francophilia—*ITAS* and its host have become a cultural punchline. In order to understand the show's place in acting culture, we need also to touch on its place in popular culture. Without a doubt the most famous and well-received parody, and at least as well-known as the show itself, is comedian Will Ferrell's Lipton impersonation in a series of *Saturday Night Live* sketches. Fey and pretentious, and filled with portentous pauses, absurd flattery, sudden dynamic shifts, garbled French phrases, and blank stares into the rafters, Ferrell's Lipton is a hyperbolic caricature of Lipton's own performance. Like any good caricature, however, it also captures some essence of its subject. Here Ferrell/Lipton introduces one of his guests (with the ellipses suggesting the portentous pauses):

> If I had a choice between interviewing my next guest . . . or getting in my homemade time machine, going back in time and interviewing William Shakespeare . . . I would tell the Bard of Avon to go screw himself! For if a single frame from one of our guest's movies were placed in an envelope . . . wrapped in linen . . . and sealed in a lead sarcophagus . . . it would still be so powerful it could cure some form of malaria. Ladies and gentlemen . . . please welcome . . . Billy Bob Thornton.[36]

Perhaps not surprisingly, Lipton has publicly objected to Ferrell's impersonation. On an April 2001 episode of *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, he said Ferrell's impression "got it all wrong" because of his French mispronunciation and his constant interruption of guests, which Lipton said he never does. More recently on O'Brien's show, Lipton has become more game about mocking his persona, as evidenced by another appearance on *Conan O'Brien*, in which he donned a sideways Budweiser cap and dramatically recited from a podium the lyrics to "PopoZão," a single from pop singer (and ex-husband of Britney Spears) Kevin Federline. In another he again recites a poem and then dances alongside a recurring character, Horny Manatee. Even these self-ridiculing moments, however, suggest an investment in the proper representation of the show's orality.

Lipton's complaints about Ferrell's impersonation, however blinkered they may appear at first, if looked at another way seem justified. By observing that *Saturday Night Live*, among many others, can't seem to take his show seriously, he exposes the dilemma of a high-minded television show like *ITAS*. What, we may ask, is the importance of being earnest for *ITAS*? In his pointed essay "Deride and Conquer," Mark Crispin Miller has argued that television has cannily embraced self-mocking irony as an inoculation against charges that its emptiness exists only to shill products to receptive viewers. "No matter how bad TV gets," Miller writes, "it cannot easily be deplored or criticized as long as it manifests its own unseriousness."[37] When television constantly winks at its own salesmanship, it flatters us that we cannot be fooled into watching or purchasing; we are equal collaborators and not mindless dupes on a mission for entertainment. Deeply self-reflexive, television denies anything outside itself, allowing no possibility of transcending its sphere of consumption and advertising.

Yet the hilarious, uncomfortable earnestness of the show and James Lipton himself—its idolatry, its sobri-

ety, its embarrassing sophistication—offer exactly the possibility that the medium can be transcended. I do not mean this (nor, I think, does Miller) as a normative evaluation of the show as simply "better than" other television shows of its kind. Rather, I see *ITAS* dialectically responding to its subject matter as historical memory, in the manner of Benjamin's "dialectical enchantment." According to Benjamin, a properly dialectical mode of historiography must simultaneously appreciate the utopian potential of the ancient myths that lie buried and warped within their contemporary forms, and recognize in their distortion the cruelty and alienation of modern capitalist society. The mythology of acting, at times undermined by the demands of the Hollywood global economy, on *ITAS* is displayed for us underneath the layers of talk-show evanescence and cynical marketing strategy.

NOTES

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2. Chris Hedges, "Public Lives: A Pompous Interviewer? Yes, but That's the Point," *New York Times*, 1 March 2001, B2. See also Andrew Corsello, "Don't Cry for Me, Hollywood," *GQ*, March 2001, 208–14; and Sarah Vowell, "Fishers of Men: Two Offbeat Talk Shows Reinvent the Celebrity Interview," *Salon*, 29 June 1998, http://www.salonmag.com/ent/music/vowe/1998/06/29vowe.htm (accessed 25 January 2005).
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4. Robert J. Erler, "A Guide to Television Talk," in Bernard M. Timberg, *Television Talk: A History of the TV Talk Show* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002), 204–303.
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6. Jay Rosen, "The Talk Show and the Terror of Conversation," *Et Cetera* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1990–91): 368.
7. Corsello, 212.
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11. Rosen, 367.
12. Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 288.
13. "Dick Cavett: The Art of Show and Tell," *Time*, 7 June 1971, 80.
14. Dick Cavett and Christopher Porterfield, *Cavett* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), 327–28.
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16. Joseph Litvak, *Strange Gourmets: Sophistication, Theory, and the Novel* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 4.
17. Corsello, 210.
18. Vowell, n.p.
19. Ibid.
20. Patton Oswald, "Comics Come Home 3," n.d. Broadcast on the cable channel Comedy Central.
21. Litvak, 3.
22. Corsello, 212.
23. Susan Sontag, "Notes on 'Camp,'" in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1961; Picador, 2001), 283.
24. Litvak, 8.
25. L. E. Sissman, "Work, For the Night Is Coming," *New Yorker*, 6 May 1972, 42.
26. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary Online,* a *fancy* is, obseletely, "An alleged name for the pansy." See also the related terms *fancy man* and *fancy dan.* Profiles of Cavett rarely avoided suggestions of feyness—his athletic inability as a child and his early fascination with magic and theater, for example.
27. Corsello, 210.
28. See for example The Faux Harlequin, <shell824@uswest.net>, "James Lipton a simpering asshole?", in <alt.showbiz.gossip>, 22 January 2001.
29. Corsello, 210.
30. Richard Stengel, *You're Too Kind: A Brief History of Flattery* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 162.
31. Ibid., 180.
32. Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1978), 147–54. See also "*Le discours jubilatoire*" in *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), 112.
33. Alan Riding, "Venturing Outside Actors Studio (to Paris)," *New York Times*, 10 September 2002, E1.
34. Vowell, n.p.
35. The Lipton/Pivot questionnaire consists of ten questions:
    What is your favorite word?
    What is your least favorite word?
    What turns you on (spiritually, professionally . . .)?
    What turns you off?
    What sound or noise do you love?
    What sound or noise do you hate?
    What is your favorite curse word?
    What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?
    What profession would you not like to attempt?
    If heaven exists, what would you like to hear God say when you arrive?
36. http://snltranscripts.jt.org/01/01factorsstudio.phtml (accessed 3 October 2005).
37. Mark Crispin Miller, "Deride and Conquer," in Todd Gitlin (ed.), *Watching Television* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 225.

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ABSTRACT The cable television show *Inside the Actors Studio* struggles to preserve a mythology of film acting as it negotiates the consumerism of the Hollywood industry. This negotiation happens both through the show's orientation to the talk-show genre and the function and impact of its polarizing host James Lipton.

KEYWORDS *Inside the Actors Studio*, Method acting, film performance, talk show, celebrity

■ RIC GENTRY

ANOTHER MEDITATION ON DEATH

An Interview with Oliver Stone

WORLD TRADE CENTER (2006) IS BASED on the true story of two Port Authority patrolmen, John McLoughlin (Nicholas Cage) and Will Jimeno (Michael Peña) who, on a voluntary rescue mission into one of the flaming towers on 9/11, are suddenly buried in an avalanche of twisted steel and pulverized concrete when the building collapses. Until their deliverance late the following day, the film parallels the struggle of the two men to stay alive, with their anxious wives (Maria Bello and Maggie Gyllenhaal) at home as the world trembles with news of the terrorist attacks on the city of New York.

Gripping, tender, and extremely powerful, *World Trade Center* is Oliver Stone's sixteenth film as director. It is also one of his most restrained, with straightforward editing and camerawork and far less dialogue or narration than his previous films. By incorporating live television footage and commentary, there is also a compelling sense of immediacy but few images of the burning towers or their destruction. More important is that the mythic proportion of the 2001 national trauma becomes humanized in the grueling, finally transfigurative ordeal of McLoughlin and Jimeno.

Though Stone eschews any overt reference to the profusion of well-documented counter-explanations to the official version of 9/11, no other director–writer has so influenced the American political debate or the country's struggles with self-awareness. With such films as *Salvador, Platoon* (both 1986), *Wall Street* (1987), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), *The Doors, JFK* (both 1991), *Heaven and Earth* (1993), *Natural Born Killers* (1994), *Nixon* (1995), and *Any Given Sunday* (1999), the three-time Academy Award-winner combines technical brilliance, stylistic audacity, and moral conviction to confront and unsettle as much as entertain. Still, as he discusses here, *World Trade Center* may also indicate a new direction in Stone's methods and preoccupations.

We met at the west Los Angeles editing facility last August where Stone was completing a three-hours-forty-minutes DVD edition of *Alexander*, the 2004 epic that faltered at the domestic box office but enjoyed huge popularity abroad. Robust and very fit, Stone more resembles a retired running back than a Hollywood aesthete. Prone to laugh heartily, especially at his own foibles, Stone is nonetheless an engaging, pensive speaker who does not mince words. This is, after all, the man who once said, "You should make a film as if it's going to be your last breath on earth."[1]

RIC GENTRY: Where were you on that day, September 11, 2001?

OLIVER STONE: I was asleep in L.A. My wife woke me up and put the TV on. I saw what everyone else saw. I was upset and very angry. But I felt it most deeply on the following Sunday, five days later, the day you spend with your family. Here was a Sunday and the families of the victims would not have them there. They'd never be coming home. That's when it struck me the hardest. That's when I felt the emptiness. It was horrible.

Later on, another part of me was trying to keep the historical perspective. John F. Kennedy's murder, Vietnam, Watergate, the Oklahoma City bombing. I've seen many acts of horror through these some sixty years. You try not to lose your balance when overwhelmingly tragic things happen.

It wasn't long after 9/11 that you left the country to shoot Alexander. *You were gone for three years. In the meantime, the U.S. had invaded Iraq. Were you prepared for the mood of the country when you returned to make* World Trade Center*?*

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Photo: François Duhamel. © 2006 Paramount Pictures

Oliver Stone (left) and Nicolas Cage during the filming of *World Trade Center*

You know, going back to 2001, I was working on a script at the time, a My Lai kind of story, that didn't get made precisely because there was this change, this fear. Before that I was working on *Beyond Borders* [2003], about a relief worker in Africa that was produced but I didn't stay involved with it.

But the point is, these kinds of subjects were immediately endangered after 9/11. These kinds of films were the first casualties of the attack. Suddenly there was a kind of taboo with certain themes and stories. This is what fear does. Fear plays a role in controlling the system—commercially, politically, in every way.

And I remember getting into trouble at New York's Lincoln Center in a big forum called "On Making Movies Matter: The Role of Filmmaking in the National Debate." It was scheduled for October (2001), in advance of 9/11.

I spoke for about an hour, suggesting Pontecorvo stuff, *The Battle of Algiers*, confronting current issues in a dramatic but gripping way so that people would pay attention. I said it was a good time for that kind of filmmaking. But in a one-minute aside, I also said some things that were later quoted as if that were the gist of what I had to say. You know, I was very upset that the media was not putting 9/11 within the context of the previous decades of history. Later I was criticized for what I said, but the fact that this so-called "aside" was what got the attention told me that there was already the start of a drum beat for war, born out of this specter of fear.

What's ironic is that I left the country to shoot *Alexander*, who made the first successful invasion of the East, the first westerner who actually succeeded, while Bush was making his foray into Iraq.

What appealed to you about World Trade Center*?*
I thought it was an excellent yet simple movie [written by Andrea Berloff] after *Alexander*'s grandiloquence, so to speak. To come back to contemporary America, after the Iranian war of 330 B.C., some 2400 years later, to the seminal event of this war. 9/11 precipitates Iraq, which may kick off more wars. The bottom line is that 9/11 is the Sarajevo assassination of this century, the French Revolution in the previous century. You know what I'm saying. 9/11 is the monolith.

I thought, what better way to tell it but through two guys who were part of this dramatic event and who had strong family lives that gave them reasons to survive.

That was the issue I kept thinking about. What motivated them to endure? It was horrific what they experienced. I might've given up. There was something in John and Will that pulled them through.

The two men are buried and immobile in the Trade Center *rubble for over quarter of the story. When you first read the screenplay, it must have seemed very difficult to make that work, dramatically or otherwise.*
I did see that as a challenge. Claustrophobia is a factor in a film like this. But *World Trade Center* is not so much a question of containment as it is about light. You know, when I see the movie, what I like best about it are the spiritual qualities. When you think about Nick and Mike, their heads barely visible in these strange angles, you follow their eyes because you want to believe in them, you want to believe they're going to survive. You watch their eyes as the measure of life in them.

There's something very poignant about Nic Cage as a head in a heap of rocks and twisted metal just muttering these very ordinary words which nonetheless have a certain meaning. [Imitating Cage in a stricken,

monotonous voice] "My wife's name is Donna. My kid J.J. is the unexpected one. I could've been a lieutenant. I never smile." You know? As if he's reminding himself of who he is, clinging to these pieces of himself.

I understand that you looked at films by Robert Bresson and Carl Theodor Dreyer.
Yeah, in relation to the "hole" [the underground chasm beneath the collapsed building where the men are trapped]. I don't want to compare our movie to theirs. Those films are classics, but what we took from them was the stillness, the sense of stillness in the use of the close-up. It should be something you feel as much as see, a quiet through and beyond the frame.

You work this out in a triangular relationship between the actor, the camera, and the director. One gets the impression that the actor dominates a scene but it's these three elements. In scenes where all you have is the actor before you, as in the "hole," you realize that these are the rudiments of what makes a dramatic moment on screen.

With the lighting, [cinematographer] Seamus [McGarvey] was really trying to give it this struggle between light and dark. We tried to rhyme it out so it wouldn't be overly dark in the eyes. We had, like, nine scenes in thirty-five minutes, less than four minutes a scene in the "hole," but we started with the longest scene first and worked back from there.

And each scene in the "hole" gets lighter. As the day gets darker and drearier with the women, the scenes in the "hole" warm up, with the fires, the flashlights of the rescuers, so you see more and more.

There's this whole transference. If you remember, in the beginning of the movie, New York goes from the dark to the light. The next day, John rises from the "hole," coming up into the light. So this light/dark thing is going on the whole movie. That was the only way we could stylistically give it what it needed, this rhythm in light.

I think a lot of the power of Bresson's close-ups lies in the black and white. A lot of it lies, frankly, in the lenses of the time, the focal depth for those movies in France in the 1940s and 50s. It was the Éclair, I believe, a beautiful camera with good hard lenses, great primes. We were on the edge of black and white in the "hole," but it was still color.

This study of faces, especially faces so immobile, with nothing else to portray emotion or life itself, struck me as the distillation of a soul to its most refined and expressive capacity.
Thank you. There were metaphysical elements. My therapist [laughs] called it another meditation on death. But, unlike *Alexander*, it was the common man and the transcendence of the common man.

If you look at the movie closely, we took both of them several times to death states. Nic more than once, especially what I call the "*2001* sequence," [where] the light's pulsing over his face. I was reading to him from the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, trying to take the actors to the edges, the edges of death, based on philosophy and the little that I know of having sometimes felt like I had died. I mean, what is death? Something to pass through but also something larger than we are.

Nic really wanted to push it. He enclosed himself in a [sensory deprivation tank] and stayed there. So did Michael. And they spoke with the men whose characters they played. What John went through is unbelievable, what he claims was going through the whole experience in excruciating pain for twenty-two hours without losing consciousness. It's impossible for me to believe that because I could never endure what he did. But for a man to go through twenty-two hours of that without losing a moment of consciousness, that's where I softened the movie. I didn't think the audience would sense how vulnerable he was without this lapse.

Was there anything else you did to invoke this spiritual sense?
We tried every technique. I would sit there and read to them but it was a whole thing going on, with the lighting, the mood, the feel, the pulsing. Of course the crew was not too big. We were in very dark and dank places. The movie goes very much into death.

This is very interesting because not only is this part of the spirituality of the film and a later sense of resurrection for the characters but, in another sense, a rebirth of a kind for the viewer, the way we look at 9/11 through the experience of World Trade Center. *There's a regeneration out of the cataclysm.*
I think that's the most important message of the film. You can come back, survive these horrible things. It's not always true but we'd like it to be true. It was true for John and Will.

Let me read you something you once said about heroes, which I thought applied to World Trade Center. *This is from the book* Oliver Stone's USA. *In an essay by [Purdue University historian] James R. Farr, he quotes you saying, "I think the meaning of heroism has a lot to do with evolving into a higher human being. Heroism is tied to the evolution of consciousness."*

Further down [Farr] again quotes you, that "Heroes are the test pilots for an entire culture" and "the hero transcends self and death in the belief of something more."[2]

Photo: François Duhamel. © 2006 Paramount Pictures

Flashlights in *World Trade Center*

That's what I was hoping for, a kind of transcendence, a cultural surge with the movie. But I don't feel that in the culture.

Why do you think that is?
[Sighs] Many things. You know how I feel about the [mass] media, for example. It's been the subject or part of the subject of some of my films, how it entrances and pollutes and trivializes. There's also the technical devices [for mass communication] that leave people with fragments of information that do not add up and [therefore] an incomplete, confusing and finally abstract picture of the world. The devices become ends of their own, forms of stimulus rather than sources of information.

You see people everywhere with cell phones. It always bothered me, like they're walking down the street talking to themselves.
[Laughs] What does that tell us?

There's a preoccupation in your films with parental figures, Alexander*, for example,* Platoon, Wall Street, [Born on the] Fourth of July. *With* World Trade Center, *I began to sense that the peril of the characters, in a figurative way, was that they were members of a family whose parents had abandoned them. Where is the air power in response? The National Guard? The Commander-in-Chief? There's no one there but these unprepared citizens amidst the disaster.*
But that's the way it's always going to be. If you're a civilian in war, which we are, you're going to have to deal with it on your own, believe me. If you see two sides on the street, don't run to either one.

But it's a pretty frightening thought, that the federal government wasn't there.
Of course not. When guys came back from Vietnam, we knew the fuckin' score. The government can't take care of shit. You want to go to a veteran's hospital to die? When did a government program ever work? All they did was build some fucking highways. And of course create the military-industrial complex.

What do you think really happened on 9/11?
I couldn't tell you. But the consequences of that day are far worse. We're in a far worse position now. There's more terror, debt for war, constitutional breakdown. I mean, where we are is much more serious. How do you fight this? Look at now.

I'm not a journalist. I'm not a documentarian. As you know, I'm a dramatist. It takes time for me. I have to step back from this. But what I see is not over. There's more comin'. We're in the middle of the sea on a fuckin' World War III boat. There's no point in writing a novel about the conflict. Let's try to find out what the fuck is happening. This is very serious.

Every day 200 people die in Iraq, get blown up here, blown up there. We started the whole fucking thing and now we're immune to it. If 200 people died every day in some American city, we wouldn't feel that way.

This guy, this jerk—after 9/11, you don't pour fuel on the fire. You don't make things into a war when they're a battle. You see what I'm trying to say? You don't make police action into a war.

You don't create the Department of Homeland Security for $50 billion. Look at Katrina after Homeland Security. Where the fuck was the help there? Where the fuck was it? We all know what American bureaucracy achieves.

Alexander was willing to change as he went East. As he went East, he became more Eastern. Whereas Bush is intractable, unable to evolve, to understand the Eastern mentality. Of course, he's not a frontline leader as Alexander was.

World Trade Center *was shot in spherical, [a] 1.85: 1 [screen ratio]. That must have been a very deliberate decision, unrelated to budget, because you have a city [New York] that [with high-rises and skyscrapers] is very vertical. You've usually worked with anamorphic [2.35: 1 ratio, or "widescreen"], often very daringly. I wondered what were the considerations in shooting 1.85:1 for this film.*

I've regularly gone back to spherical. There's something modest about it. There was something modest about the movie. We could have made it work with anamorphic. It might've been spectacular, but to stare up at a giant screen seems somehow not in keeping of what this movie was about. The emotions are deep and profound but should be presented humbly.

I think I'm getting simpler now as I get older. Those who like my films would say there's an intensity and power in the work, at whatever period I was making movies. It may not have worked for some, but you felt it. Even *Alexander*, for those who didn't understand or like it, there was a punch. *World Trade Center* has that punch, but it has more punch in 1.85 than it does in 2.35. You can also over-punch.

I sat with [supervising sound editor] Wylie Statemen at the very first final mix, about three or four weeks before release. When I looked at the movie with that mix, I was so disappointed. The movie was completely lost for me. Completely buried. So much fucking sound. So much detail. So much exaggeration of rocks and debris, moving and shifting. The movie was lost. The humanity was lost because the sound interfered with our touching these people.

So my job essentially after that was to really peel back that mix, much of it in the last two weeks, in the last week maybe, a hard week of long hours. We got the mix down to what I felt was a humbler scale, which is where the 1.85 comes in. It was the same principle. The sound has to fit the picture. It would have been wrong to make a 1.85 film with a 2.35 soundtrack.

Poor Wylie, I was really raggin' him. You know, I'd say, "Take this out. Take that out." And he put a lot of work into these effects. He'd just done *Poseidon II* [sic]. I said to him, "I didn't want to have that kind of movie." The sound effects were certainly adequate but they were disaster effects. Whereas this, I wanted to keep the sound as raw as possible.

And very frightening, as much of what [happens] is suggested in this movie. People fidget and react. What they're reacting to, essentially, is not something you see but something you hear.

How did you plan your shots for this film?

In many ways the shot list is going on from the very beginning, when you're writing the screenplay or in this case when you're reading it. You're making lists in your mind. It's the way you see it when you read it. It's crucial to your understanding of it. Kubrick mentioned that. So much of it is all there, the way you read it.

But then the director begins his conversations with the others—the writer, the actors, the cinematographer, the production designer, the editor, the costume designer. From there it's all an alchemy. How you see it begins to change. The purity of your vision when you read it, or wrote it, is no longer quite the same because so many other factors come into play. There's now a clutter to the image that you had.

For example, you have a big actor. You no longer have the faceless man of your imagination. Now it's Nic Cage, Jack Nicholson, or Al Pacino. They have priorities. They may want to look a certain way. You want to accommodate that without favoring the actor in a way that isn't credible or overly defers to him on screen as the star. You're always working with that. I think it's a struggle for every filmmaker. That kind of thing.

And I think part of it for me, you see it in the movies I've made, is that I try to [examine] the process of looking. You know, the way we're looking at it.

By "looking," you mean not just what we see but how we see it, the conduits for perception, in a sense.

That's a good way to put it, yeah.

How did you work with [cinematographer] Seamus McGarvey?

One thing Seamus did was enable me to intercut the scenes in the "hole" and I ended up doing that. The script changed in the editing. So it was good not to have to be held in by too much restriction of light. He gave me fine latitude on the negative but he shot it on the edge of darkness, too.

Earlier, we didn't talk about shots so much because we knew that ultimately much of it would be decided when we got there, to the scenes in the "hole." I told him my point of view, which was essentially inside the characters, a very subjective viewpoint. But sometimes Seamus would put the camera somewhere and all I would say is, "No, I don't feel it there." That's all. And he was very open. He let me guide the camera because often I can't put the camera in a certain place. I just can't shoot there.

To find the right angle, once you had the actor in the "hole," was crucial. If you didn't have the right angle on them, fuck. Believe me, we worked with this because every move in the "hole" was so expensive in terms of time, energy. You never got any momentum if you

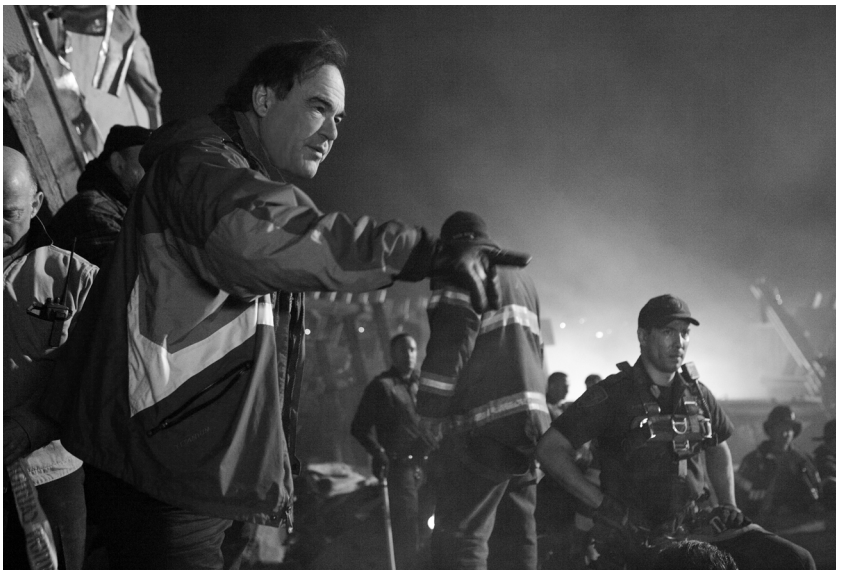

Photo: François Duhamel. © 2006 Paramount Pictures

Stone directing *World Trade Center*

didn't get the angle. Those first few days in the "hole" we suffered. We would shoot and not be happy and you're dealing with a story about pain and the actors are in pain, too. It's very tough to shoot that.

In what ways did World Trade Center *evolve in the editing?*
There were fifteen, sixteen scenes in the "hole" in the original script but nine in the final version, the result of a tremendous amount of condensation. Stuff that was in scene five was moved to scene two. In the editing we wanted to keep the pace, the tension of what might happen. Tension, when you think about it, is a kind of claustrophobia, a claustrophobia in time. When you combine that with the confinement of the men, I think you start to get a compounded feeling for enclosure.

But in recutting we surprised ourselves. We had sudden explosions [that weren't in the scene as shot]. Pieces of dialogue we never thought would be there. Editing is so important because it's like a rewrite. What was originally fifty minutes in the "hole" became thirty-five. The first scene was the longest at ten minutes, as I was saying, with Don Pizello dying. The second scene was less, eight minutes, and so on.

At the same time, whenever we went back into the "hole" there was this anxiety of what the next shock would be. When there was the collapse at 5.30 p.m. of [World Trade Center] building seven in the story, you hear the collapse before you see it. When it happened for me in the editing room for the first time, I nearly jumped out of my seat.

But there were other things you didn't expect. The fireballs. The gun going off. You're never at ease.

By the end of it you have this emotional exhaustion from identifying with the characters.
That's it. That how I hoped you would feel. And I'm telling you, if we'd have cut the movie to the fifty minutes that we shot according to the script, it wouldn't have worked.

Was there anything in the use of lenses that you felt were vital to those scenes [in the "hole"]?
Seamus is the most conservative D.P. I ever worked with. He loved to work the 40[mm] and 50[mm], maybe even the 30[mm]. He liked those back from the subject with good focus. He liked to play it in the middle. I never moved around less in looking at a scene. It's all in the use of the lens for him and the depth of field.

And I never shot so conservatively, except for that Hylen lens that was suggested to Seamus by Panavision. He wanted to put certain things out of focus in the same focal field. You could be very close to Nic Cage's face, for example, and everything will be in deep focus except the eyes or the mouth. We did it about eight, ten times in the movie. It's an effect that gets under your skin. You don't even notice it but it bothers you.

Was that one reason you chose Seamus McGarvey as your cinematographer, because of this conservatism?
No. It was because I loved his work on *The Hours* [2002]. But in the broadest sense, I would say he created three distinct moods for *World Trade Center*, which was crucial to what the film accomplished and lovely photography in all three. There were the scenes in the "hole" but also the lives of the families in their homes and the night. I felt we needed those as markers in the film and I wanted to be sure we got them.

Seamus is Irish but lived in Scotland. He also did *The War Zone* [1999], a very dark film. But there was something about him that I liked. You know, I wanted to go with someone who was basically younger than me for some reason. I think it's the energy.

And I have to tell you, Seamus flew in from England and met us in New York for the first time when we were scouting. He didn't have the job yet. We found each other in the lobby and he says he was very nervous and probably talking too much. I'd forgotten this but according to Seamus, who has a heavy accent, I listened to him speak with a quizzical look on my face. Finally I leaned into him and said, "Do you come with subtitles? Because I can't understand a fucking word you say." [Laughter]

Can you believe I said that to him? The first words out of my mouth. But because I just insulted him, and couldn't understand him, I said, "Ah, come on. Let's go look at the location," which turned out to be a scout of "ground zero" at the World Trade Center. We walked the whole Center that day. Seamus says it was one of the most meaningful days in his life, even if we wouldn't have hired him, but we kind of bonded there and I wanted to keep him with me.

After the ominous shadow of the plane over the city, the look of the film changes. It's more over-cranked (slow motion) and the lenses are longer. There's a sense of disorientation.
Yes, that's right. Not too over-cranked but some. Seamus also drained some of the color.

The hospital scenes also have a very different feeling, what I want to call "etherized," spacey in a way.
I think what you mean is the fluorescent light but nothing really very special. On the contrary, I regretted those scenes. I wanted to make those scenes much more extreme, like *Born on the Fourth of July*, but we were more conventional. That's where Seamus is conservative. But probably because the "hole" is disorienting, the hospital following those scenes seems "etherized" to you.

But I hate hospital shooting because I've done so much of it. And after *ER*, what the fuck can you do? I mean, you dread those things. And yet, the hospital scenes, by sticking to the story, by sticking to the emotion, they work beautifully for me.

How does World Trade Center *reflect who you are now?*
I'll probably make more films like this. I don't believe in all this juiced-up stuff in overdrive. I did that when I was younger. And there was a reason. It developed out of the story. But I just feel like there's so much imagery now. I see it everywhere. Commercials, TV. TV especially. They're doing my style from fifteen years ago on TV. And they're doing it better and they're doing it well.

But so what? Now I want to go back, more to Bergman and Dreyer and Bresson. I'm not saying I have their talent but I like that direction. They're older and looking for what to them the deeper meanings are.

Is that what you meant before, by the reference to metaphysics?
That element of it was very important to me [with *World Trade Center*]. I don't know if it's—some people got it. Some people wrote very beautifully about it and some people didn't get it at all.

Was the cross in the church [in World Trade Center*] an allusion to the last shot of [Bresson's]* Diary of a Country Priest*?*
No. But what amazed me, and I don't want to compare myself to him in any way because I didn't follow his path as a director at all, is the stillness in his frames. I come back to that. With Bresson it's finding the right close-up and the right lighting. It's very clear that there's peace at the center. And torture at the same time.

And I think if you do the same, apply the same principle of close-ups in the "hole," by setting up the right angle with the right lighting, you will get the best from the actor, some kind of refinement, in the look itself. I don't know what it is, something psychic or metaphysical that comes out. Bresson was an expert, as was Dreyer, of finding that in the face, the human face.

NOTES

1. Robert Brent Toplin (ed.), *Oliver Stone's USA*: *Film, History and Controversy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 223.
2. Ibid., 158–59.

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ABSTRACT Oliver Stone discusses his film *World Trade Center* with Ric Gentry, discussing the political context and emphasizing the influence of Robert Bresson on the film's spiritual concerns and its depiction of heroism; he also the details of the cinematography, editing, and sound edit.

KEYWORDS 9/11, *World Trade Center*, Oliver Stone, heroism, cinematography

DVD

The Battle of Algiers (La battaglia di Algeri)

Director: Gillo Pontecorvo. © 1966 Casbah Films. Publisher: Criterion Collection, 2004. $49.95, 3 discs. Catalog number: BAT120. Extra features: 7 documentaries, booklet.

The original release of *The Battle of Algiers* in 1966 was controversial. Gillo Pontecorvo, who had fought with the Italian partisans against the Fascists in World War II, was a committed leftist, and he and his collaborator, Franco Solinas, were actively seeking a vehicle for their political ideas. Solinas had given up entirely on political activity in Europe, where the working classes had become part of the status quo, and he turned to the colonies, where the experience of class struggle was still lived and oppression confronted daily. Algeria, which had recently gained independence from France in 1962, offered the perfect material for their investigation of the confrontation between nationalist feeling and colonialism. While the movie received high praise—winning the Golden Lion at the 1966 Venice Film Festival—it was banned in France for nearly five years.

It is not hard to imagine the original reception of the film, at a time when Europe was steadily shedding its colonies, and these new countries looked optimistically to a future of self-determination. But Pontecorvo's film, while firmly in support of the Algerians, is far more ambiguous than a first-time viewer might expect. While Pontecorvo worked with the new Algerian government as well as former insurgents, such as Saadi Yacef, who had organized the bombing campaigns so effective in the struggle, he did not follow Sergei Eisenstein down the path of heroic mythology. While Pontecorvo's camera catalogues the outrages committed by the French on the local population—the humiliations of checkpoints, arbitrary detention, torture, and execution for political crimes—it also registers the human cost of resistance. Few sequences in film are so gripping as Pontecorvo's recreation of the retaliatory bombings of two cafes and a Pan Am office by the Front Libération National (FLN), a montage in which female bombers ponder the faces of civilians they are about to maim or kill. Part of the message of the film seems to be that a revolution must outgrow its insurgents, who, while essential in kindling resistance, are perhaps best consumed in the process.

Most remarkable about *The Battle of Algiers* is its intricate portrayal of insurgent methods, an account so rich that it has subsequently been used by other revolutionary groups (famously, the Black Panthers in the 1960s and the IRA later) as well as screened at the Pentagon in 2003 (presumably defensively, and not for purposes of destabilization). Unlike other leftist films that have didactic aims, however, Pontecorvo integrates the story with the instruction. There are no overlong set speeches, such as in Costa-Gavras's *Z* (1969), and exposition and incident never seem at odds.

ROMANTICISM VERSUS PRAGMATISM

The superb Criterion release of *The Battle of Algiers* sets a new standard for DVD editions of classic films. The production of the edition, however, came about at a complicated historical moment. According to Abbey Lustgarten, who co-produced the DVD with Karen Hendrickson, the rights were acquired in 2002 and research began in 2003, with the eventual release in October 2004. This put the production squarely within the fraught public debates surrounding the 9/11 attacks, the second Iraq war, and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. "We couldn't just frame it in cinema history,"[1] Lustgarten recalls. *The Battle of Algiers* was not only "a film that was so stirring in its representation and so true to what had happened," but also "a part of history." Moreover, *The Battle of Algiers* had become insistently relevant yet again. Lustgarten notes that contemporary events consistently informed their work, or "at least their questions about the film." Lustgarten recalls the "visceral" force of seeing a screening of *The Battle of Algiers* presented by Julian Schnabel at the Grand Classics film series (a series arranged "as a way to bring people together after 9/11"[2]) as she began work on the film. For the producers, 9/11 "posed a lot of questions for us that perhaps we really hadn't considered before," and it led them to Richard Clarke, whose sharp criticisms of the Bush administration were prominent at the time. At such a moment, it is no wonder Lustgarten and her co-workers "spent a lot of time tracking the news coverage."

Many of the edition's supplementary materials are interventions in their own right, attempts to orient *The Battle of Algiers* to a particular ideology and to apply it to a specific historical moment. Three of these supplementary materials stand out—two documentaries, now archival, produced for different audiences, and a June 2004 interview produced by Criterion for the reissue of the film. On one level, these materials simply offer competing interpretations of the film, more or less persuasive. From another perspective, however, they tell us something about the nature of Pontecorvo's vision, the force of which can be aligned so variously and so productively.

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The late Edward Said's 1992 documentary, *The Dictatorship of Truth*, offers the most subtly persuasive of the applications of *The Battle of Algiers*. Said provides an informative account of Pontecorvo's career. Ostensibly the documentary examines Pontecorvo's notorious inability to complete projects, and Said's literary training serves him well in respecting the ambiguities of such creative mysteries. But never far from the surface of this investigation is the Palestinian intifada, which was well underway as Said made his film. In Pontecorvo's film, underdogs find a way to defeat the overwhelming force of the colonizers, the oppressed come to consciousness of the nature of their oppression, and individual leaders give way to crowds of spontaneous insurgents. For Said, the elements of resistance to colonialism and the nationalist struggle for freedom in Pontecorvo's film are relevant to the Israel–Palestine conflict. The Algerian and Palestinian uprisings form different parts of the same long march to liberation. Hence the film becomes, in Said's account, potentially a harbinger of success in Palestine. Said, noting that Pontecorvo had considered making a film about the Palestinian conflict, concludes that such a project would have been "the logical contemporary extension of the political situation represented in *The Battle of Algiers*."

This view of *The Battle of Algiers* does not, however, exhaust its possibilities, as is clear from the May 2004 Criterion interview, "*The Battle of Algiers*: A Case Study," which features Richard Clarke, former national counter-terrorism coordinator under Presidents Clinton and Bush, and Michael Sheehan, former State Department coordinator for counter-terrorism. If Said finds a pattern of romance in Pontecorvo, these two career intelligence officials find only tragic incomprehension and error. Clarke resolutely places *The Battle of Algiers* against the current Iraq situation, a choice which ominously aligns the American perspective with that of the French earlier. Clarke, like the French officers in the movie, does not consider the situation in terms of the indigenous population, but in terms of the pragmatic aims of the occupying power, and his remarks are built on this assumption.

The pragmatism displayed by both Sheehan and Clarke is consistent with some aspects of Pontecorvo's vision. The director famously noted that he sought to impose a "dictatorship of the truth" through documentary-style realism. Clarke and Sheehan tend to accept the film at face value, as a case study. "It may have been the 1950s," quips Clarke, "but it's all happening now." Both officials agree that terrorism seems to work in the film because "there is no political strategy to counter it," that is, the French lose the battle not so much for the clichéd "hearts and minds" of the Algerians but for "values and ideas." For Clarke and Sheehan, failures in Iraq stem from the inability of the U.S. government to state clearly its aims in the region, to recognize the legitimate aspirations of Iraqis, and to craft some plan that balances the two successfully and isolates the terrorists. The deepest lesson of Pontecorvo's film, for these two analysts, is that one might, as the French did, hunt down the insurgents yet create more powerful resistance in the process. Invoking another well-worn phrase, one redolent of American misadventures in Southeast Asia, Clarke notes that the French won the battle and lost the war.

Torture, or, as Henri Alleg so memorably put it during the Algerian War, "The Question," runs through all these supplementary materials.

But the "case study" approach illuminates *The Battle of Algiers* only up to a point. The discussion of torture prompted by the movie illustrates the limitation. While Sheehan mentions, in passing, that torture is "immoral and illegal," the analysis turns upon the utility of torture, whether information acquired through abuse is reliable or not. Clarke and Sheehan think not, and, stressing the resistance created by such abuses, they advise against it. Pontecorvo's strangely lyrical depiction of torture, in which victims display something of the ecstatic agonies of Christian martyrs, and in which we hear liturgical music rather than screams, surely hints at something more than a lesson to be drawn or another item to be noted in a list of best practices for counter-insurgency. Working in the shadow of 9/11, which transformed a complex political situation into a sharp (if oversimplified) contrast between "us" and "them," Clarke and Sheehan take up the agonistic, tragic approach, in which analysis bends toward the extremes of "yes" and "no," and in which decisions feel less like choice than compulsion.

Part of Pontecorvo's genius clearly lies in the way his film can sustain this variety of emphases. If its structure as a film is that of a romance, some of the most memorable sequences seem emphatically tragic. As the plot moves forward, the leaders of the FLN are taken, systematically, by the efficient and highly organized French paratroopers called in to restore order to the city. Viewers are unlikely to forget the cool precision and epigrammatic grace of Colonel Mathieu, Pontecorvo's fictionalized composite of several French officers, who, even as he applies his ruthlessly efficient

techniques of counter-insurgency, knows that the tide of history, at least in Algeria, is against the colonialists. The scene in which Mathieu (played by Jean Martin, one of the only professional actors employed by Pontecorvo in the movie) defends his repressive measures to a group of journalists by posing to them a brilliant series of either/or choices, reminds us of the power of such a perspective and its rhetoric. Either Algeria is a French department, Mathieu informs his audience, or the French leave. While the first choice seems unpalatable, the last seems impossible. "Therefore, to be precise," counters Mathieu, when asked point blank about the use of torture, "it's my turn to ask a question. Should France stay in Algeria? If your answer is still yes, then you must accept the consequences." Such is the chthonic intensity of the divisive rhetoric of tragedy—lucid and, within its own narrow bounds, impeccable. Mathieu embodies the father figure that such wartime exigencies foster: implacable, but possibly offering the safety of decisive action. It is against this predictable urgency and trajectory of tragedy that Pontecorvo places the romantic birth of liberty: the swirling crowds that figure mass revolt and revolutionary consciousness. The film can only hint at the direction of this development, and the lyrical movements of the crowd, however fragmented, however irresolute, provide the final image of the movie. The revolution has passed beyond its eloquent but doomed spokesmen (themselves also the stuff of tragedy, like their counterpart Mathieu) into the far less familiar realm of collective action.

IRONIES

The set includes a third documentary, *Return to Algiers*, made by Pontecorvo himself for Italian television in 1992. Pontecorvo revisits the city thirty years after its emancipation from French, but he finds neither the film's original notes of romance, so prominent to Said, nor the tragic elements so prominent now. What the artist behind this masterpiece finds is, rather, irony.

Return to Algiers, made for the Italian television show *Mixer*, is sensational in its own right. Recent events in Algeria had put the country back into a revolutionary moment. The victorious party in *The Battle of Algiers*, the FLN, had established a one-party state, and it faced its own insurgency from the fundamentalist Front Islamique du Salut (FIS). Demonstrations by the FIS had been crushed, but, in a turn of events recalling the original revolution, the FLN had been forced to allow elections, which were won by the FIS and promptly nullified by the FLN. Three days before Pontecorvo's documentary was to be shown, Mohamed Boudiaf, the newly selected leader of Algeria, was assassinated. Pontecorvo's interview with Boudiaf for the documentary would then have been one of the last for this leader, a long-standing critic of the FLN who had been recalled from exile.

The ironies of the situation are not lost on Pontecorvo as he walks through the streets of Algiers, revisiting some of the places where he shot his film. A particularly effective sequence shows a soldier dispersing a crowd of FIS supporters with machine-gun fire, only to see the crowd of demonstrators form again, much like the swirling crowds in the concluding scenes of the earlier movie. The leaders of the FIS are evidently as shadowy as Saadi Yasef and Larbi Ben M'hidi thirty years earlier: their supporters refer to them, but they are not shown on camera. A visit to the infamous prison, at which one of the most riveting scenes of the film—the guillotining of a political prisoner—was shot, provides a glimpse of the more than 5,000 FIS members currently incarcerated. A walk through the Casbah, ground zero of both insurgencies, shows that conditions there have, if anything, deteriorated. The once-populist FLN leadership seems nearly as distant from the people as the French colonizers were in the 1950s.

Pontecorvo explicitly counterpoints scenes from the film with contemporary conditions in Algiers, splicing his pseudo-documentary into his documentary. For instance, he replays the sequence from *The Battle of Algiers* in which his cinematic representation of the historical figure Ben M'Hidi, one of the founders of the FLN, explains to Ali La Pointe, a kind of Malcolm X figure who moves from aimless petty criminal to committed revolutionary in the film, that the real test of the revolution is what comes after, the successful building of a state and a society. "It's hard enough," muses Ben M'Hidi, "to start a revolution, even harder to sustain it, and hardest of all to win it." What in the film was a measured statement of determination, a part of La Pointe's radical education, or a manifestation of the rebirth so central to the romance genre, now seems ironic, an index of revolutionary failure. Most ironic of all is the position taken by Pontecorvo on Islamic fundamentalism. If the Casbah, with its narrow, labyrinthine streets and ways, served as the citadel for the FLN, 10,000 mosques, underwritten by Saudi money, serve as the breeding-ground for a new insurrection. And what was presented as a popular rebellion deriving from the lived experience of oppression has now taken on the form of a religious conflict imported, at least in part, from outside. In *The Battle of Algiers* religion was part of the suppressed life of the Casbah, a hurried and makeshift ritual, but above all a matter of people meet-

Left to right: Edward Said in *Pontecorvo: The Dictatorship of Truth*, Pontecorvo at Barberousse Prison in *Return to Algiers*, and an unrepentant Paul Aussaresses in *L'Ennemi intime: Etats d'armes*

ing, however irregularly. Religion, at least as represented in *Return to Algiers*, takes the more inhuman form of mass worship. The highly individualized faces for which the earlier film is so famous do not figure in Pontecorvo's picture of the new religious fervor.

Another major irony that emerges in *Return to Algiers* is the deterioration of the position of women in Algeria. Pontecorvo's film was remarkable for its depiction of women's participation in the struggle. We see women fighting and dying alongside men, delivering weapons in assassinations, abetting men in escapes, and ultimately, in one of the film's most famous sequences, setting bombs in cafes. The ululating cries of the veiled women, so unearthly to foreign ears, are one of the most durable images of both the film and the Algerian struggle. Pontecorvo, on his return, carefully examines the systematic withdrawal of women from the public sphere in Algeria, a repression characterized as a return to traditional values for which no extant tradition can be found. For Pontecorvo, there are only ambiguities and ironies in this new fundamentalism, in which girls who have taken the veil explain their decision with an unstable mixture of religious obedience and personal affirmation. Perhaps, as in *The Battle of Algiers*, repression ultimately will create the resistance necessary to defeat such oppression, but the ideologies at play seem far more complex than those that shaped the colonial context. In the interview that accompanies the documentary, Pontecorvo pleads for understanding of this new insurgency, denouncing fundamentalism, but insisting that it has become a vehicle for the oppressed, and deploring the easy confusion of Islam, a tolerant faith, with fundamentalist appropriations of religion. But there is no romance ending in sight; no popular coming-to-consciousness that would match the millennial hopes of the earlier rebellion against French colonialism.

THE QUESTION

But these three accounts of Pontecorvo's masterpiece—as romance, as tragedy, and as irony—are arguably overwhelmed by the brute fact of another aspect of the movie given prominence throughout the supplementary materials. *The Battle of Algiers* opens with a scene of torture, and behind the rationalizations of Mathieu lies a massive campaign of "interrogation by force." Behind every link in Mathieu's organizational chart, which allows the French to establish the relations among insurgents and crush the resistance, are inhumane acts, in which men are beaten, electrocuted, held under water until they believe they are drowning, burned, or hung like meat until the muscles pull away from the bones. Every name, every line on the chart records this brutal process. Even more inhumane, of course, are the acts of torture not represented—the indiscriminate torture of innocents that reveals no intelligence and hence finds no place on the chart.

Torture, or, as Henri Alleg so memorably put it during the Algerian War, "The Question," runs through all these supplementary materials. Pontecorvo records it in *The Battle of Algiers* as a kind of penitential suffering on the way to the rebirth of Algerian society. Solinas, in an absorbing print interview provided with the DVD, dismisses it as purely "symptomatic," not so much a moral dilemma as an inevitable recourse that simply makes visible the inherent contradictions of colonial relations. But what persists beyond these responses is the face of Paul Aussaresses, who headed a

© 1966 Casbah Films

The Battle of Algiers, clockwise from top left: the revolution reborn, Mathieu on the march, interrogation by force, martyr to the cause

special unit that carried out torture and summary execution of insurgents. More than forty years after the Battle of Algiers, during which time he was nearly unknown, his activities omitted from accounts of the war, Aussaresses confronts the French public with the sinister details of a largely secret history. Granted amnesty by the French government, he unapologetically defends his role in a part of a documentary included in the Criterion edition, *Ennemi intime: Etats d'armes*. His unflinching discussion of the torture and murder he presided over, his scorn for the evasions of his superior officers—who connived in the torture—and the unmistakable hint of pride in his actions, cast him as the degree zero of colonial oppression, "the heart of an immense darkness," in Conrad's phrase.

Rarely has the concept of a DVD as a "study center"[3] been so well embodied. The organization of the material—disc two focusing on "Pontecorvo and the Film," the third disc on "The Film and History"—are clear, as are other goals articulated by Hendrickson: to demonstrate that Pontecorvo's vision was generally correct, and to assess the truth of Saadi Yacef's story.[4] But the careful, skilful, and indefatigable collection of materials tells yet another story, one about an artwork and its successive receptions, which goes beyond these carefully focused procedures. This magisterial edition allows viewers to reflect not only on *The Battle of Algiers* itself but also on the new meanings it has acquired over time.

NOTES

1. This information, along with subsequent quotations in the paragraph, is taken from an interview by the author with Ms. Lustgarten, 12 December 2006.
2. From the Grand Classics web page, http://www.grandclassics.com/about.shtml. Schnabel presented the film for the series on 11 June 2003, and he later appears on the Criterion DVD in one of the supplements.
3. Robert Fischer employs this useful term in a discussion of The Criterion Collection's edition of *Spartacus*. See "The Criterion Collection: DVD Editions for Cinephiles," in *Celluloid Goes Digital: Historical-Critical Editions of Films of DVD and the Internet*, ed. Martin Loiperdinger (Trier: WVT Wissenshaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2003), 99–108. The phrase is regularly used in *Cahiers du Cinéma*.
4. Interview with the author, 19 May 2006.

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ABSTRACT A consideration of the Criterion Collection DVD release of Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* (1966), discussing how the edition's accompanying documentaries help in the interpretation and contextualization of the film.

KEYWORDS Pontecorvo, Algeria, terrorism, torture, political documentary

BOOKS

ESSAY

Subtitles: On the Foreignness of Film

Edited by Atom Egoyan and Ian Balfour. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press / Alphabet City Media, 2004. $35.00 cloth. 532 pages.

The blurb for *Subtitles,* on its (transparent plastic) dust jacket, for once does not exaggerate: "The book includes many color images and ten visual projects by artists and filmmakers. The pages are horizontal, suggesting a movie screen; they use the cinematic aspect ratio of 1.66:1. Subtitles gives us not only a new way to think about film but also a singular design object."

Does *Subtitles,* which is a beautifully produced book, give us "a new way of thinking about film"? It gives us several. The collection includes a poem by Anne Carson, another by Trinh T. Minh-ha (who, I am pleased to report, is quoted more frequently than anyone else in *Subtitles*—an index of the importance of her work), some early film reviews by Jorge Luis Borges, and of course cameo appearances by the inevitable (and always interesting) Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižek. The book's own subtitle does not explain or clarify its principal title so much as provide the other pole in what is a bipolar set of basic issues. The contributions either cluster around the theme of the subtitle, or around the theme of the foreignness of film at large.

Subtitles came into their own only with the invention of the sound film. With the screening of *The Jazz Singer* in Paris in 1929, two years after its U.S. premiere, "the era of the modern subtitle was ushered in"; subtitles were "quickly recognized . . . as the most accurate way of preserving the director's and screenwriter's dramatic intentions" (22). Subtitles were far preferable to (and far cheaper than) post-synchronization. Even so, post-synchronization (or "dubbing") was to prove a stubborn foe in some quarters, notably Italy. Take Antonioni, whose *Il Grido* (1957) featured actors (Steve Cochran, Dorian Gray, Betsy Blair, Lynn Shaw) not known for their command of Italian. On the cover of the 1963 Penguin edition of Penelope Houston's *The Contemporary Cinema* is a photograph of the shooting of the celebrated terrace sequence at the end of *L'Avventura* (1960). You notice Sandro (Marcello Mastroianni), Claudia (Monica Vitti), the crew, and the equipment. Look more closely at the last-named and you'll notice the absence of a sound boom. Even a film whose every actor is Italian was post-synchronized. Nor were Italian production companies alone in having post-synchronization down to a fine art. Consider television. Laurence A. Rickles: "A Korean artist who lives and works in New York told me that when he first came to the US as a young man he expected everyone to speak Korean because that's what the Americans spoke on Korean television" (436).

And let us not be too hasty in disposing of the intertitles that punctuated silent movies. In the era of the silent film, "intertitles commented on the action, attested to the accuracy of the setting [we have only to think of the intertitles in *Birth of a Nation*, where Griffith parades the authenticity of his sets in what are, in fact, subtitles within the intertitles], identified locations, explained abstract terms or difficult concepts (such as the passage of time), played on the viewer's emotions and expressed the characters' feelings and thoughts. In addition, the typeface, type size and layout of the text on the screen were designed to suggest, symbolize or emphasize" (144). Rickles might have added that intertitles also contribute to the very *rhythm* of the typical silent film. Anyone who has had the unhappy experience of watching *The Battleship Potemkin* (1925) with its intertitles edited out—such prints do exist—will notice that the rhythm of the film has evaporated.

With the advent of sound, the use of intertitles in narrative cinema dwindled, but "letters, notes, newspaper headlines, street signs, highway signs, plaques, and other forms of written and graphic information continued to perform some of the functions of intertitles. However, alternative cinema, including avant-garde and accented cinema, have continued to experiment with on-screen titling as an expressive, narrative and calligraphic component . . . Godard's deconstructive use of graphic and calligraphic textuality since his landmark *La Chinoise* (1967) are examples of stratagems that subvert the cinematic state of dominant cinema" (150). These words (of Hamid Naficy) are well put: who can forget *La Chinoise*'s screen-sized blackboard full of proper names that get erased one by one?

Neither the shift from intertitles to subtitles, nor the superiority of the latter to post-synchronization can, then, be said to be absolute. B. Ruby Rich's singular contribution to *Subtitles* points out that while Hayao Miyazaki's animated *Princess Mononoke* (1997) became a huge hit once it was dubbed into English, dubbed versions of Roberto Benigni's *Pinocchio* (2002) and *Life is Beautiful* (1997) sank like stones. Rich: "If the good news is that (US) audiences won't accept dubbed movies, the bad news is that they don't seem to accept the alternative [subtitled movies] either" (161). Paul Dergarabedian, President of Exhibitor Relations Co., which monitors box office returns: "(US) audiences generally don't want to go to the movies to read. They'd rather the experience flowed over them, be spoon-fed rather than inter-active. Reading dialogue takes them out of the movie, shattering the illusion" (161–62). (Berthold Brecht, was your name on *La Chinoise*'s blackboard? Where are you now that we *really* need you?) Rich connects this audience passivity with "an unfortunate trait in (US) life, a longstanding national narcissism that sees a mythical version of its 'own' culture and language as primary and consigns all others to secondary status" (163). She might have added that what she is describing is a process, not a state, and that its seemingly built-in velocity increases as the attention span of the audience—segmented and assailed by the "entertainment" industry in the name of profit and cash flow—shrinks. Rich identifies "a population ignorant of how the rest of the world thinks and acts and lives and feels. The blinders imposed by monolingualism and cinematic illiteracy (my term for refusing subtitles) have created a nation

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prone to global illiteracy, bound by linguistic leashes to a univocal universe, impervious to subjectivities not its own" (164). This is on the money, as incontrovertible as its corollary, which Rich nicely terms "imperial normativity" (165): "foreign films function as a rebuke for some viewers, offering up evidence of something that watching television or watching Hollywood movies cannot yield, namely, evidence that the world is not made in 'our' image. And that neither our society nor our language is universal. Perhaps the existence of worlds where we seem not to matter is too great a blow to the narcissistic psyche of the nation" (166).

Lest you consider Rich's indictment exaggerated, consider Henri Béhor's "Cultural Ventriloquism," which indicates that "despite the enormous success of films such as *Life is Beautiful* and *Il Postino*, *Diva* and *La cage aux folles*, and all of (Pedro) Almodóvar . . . subtitled films account for less than one per cent of the total US box office" (80). Orion was driven to market Kurosawa's *Ran* (1985) by making a trailer that omitted all dialogue in Japanese, then marketed the film "in the hope that it might be mistaken for an English-language picture" (158). This is how Almodóvar's *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (1988) and Yimou Zhang's *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991) were also promoted. Even so, they pulled the audience in, and they seem not to have protested against the production company's bait-and-switch.

Prior to the advent of cable, it was almost impossible to watch a subtitled, i.e. foreign, film on U.S. TV. Networks were adamant and sang in unison: subtitled, foreign—one is of course tempted to throw in the word "alien"—films just "won't play in Peoria." The contrast with France, a country that was once regarded as the epitome of navel-gazing insularity, could not be more stark: you couldn't spend two days in Paris without becoming aware of the sheer volume of books, films, articles that are routinely translated into French. The advent of U.S. cable TV has effected changes, but here again monolingual Angloids are not always the first to enjoy the benefits of these. Chinese productions are routinely subtitled for speakers of Mandarin who don't understand Cantonese, and vice versa; these "dialects," as we Occidentals tend (belittlingly) to call languages spoken by millions of people, are written in the same way, and Maoism simplified the number of characters.

There are other reasons why the notion that subtitles "just won't play" is just plain wrong. TV sets in U.S. bars commonly have the volume turned to "mute" or "inaudible," as though alcohol made everyone deaf. From time to time there appears on the screen a device that enables those barflies who can't lip-read to follow (after a fashion) the narrative: this is a hybrid of subtitle and intertitle. Again, 9/11 made everyone aware of what was once an innovation, but is now, presumably, here to stay: running subtitles, like tickertape, beneath the image on the screen, often bearing no discernible relation to it.

Subtitles is fascinating on what constrains and enables the art of the subtitler. Henri Béhor: "subtitling is like playing 3-D scrabble in two languages" (81). "The film, transferred onto a time-coded VHS video, goes through the spotting process. The dialogue (a printout of which is provided by the filmmakers) is broken down into sequences whose length determines how many words can be printed across the screen. Rules apply, some iron-clad: 1 character per 2 frames, less than 40 characters per line (spaces and punctuation included), no more than 2 lines per subtitle, and *never* go over a cut, unless absolutely forced to" (ibid.). From this, one gets some idea of the challenge involved: the very stakes of the old *traduttore/traditore* pun are raised. If one of the two languages is English, they are raised even higher: English, Henri Béhor points out "is a third more compact than French," so subtitling is more than ever "an exercise in frustration" (84). "David Mamet is a greater challenge than Shakespeare. Mamet's dialogue is extremely fast, and the overlapping dialogue and editing can drive you nuts" (ibid.).

Film subtitles have something in common with film music, but also have something in common with the experience of exile.

Subtitling, in Connie Rickey's words, is like "condensing sonnets into haikus" (84). But it can stimulate creativity and inventiveness. Patrizia Rozema, who says she used subtitles as "lifelines" (66) in *Desperanto* (what a good *title*!): an Angloid character falls asleep at a Francophone party in Montreal, "In her dreams she finds subtitles . . . finding it difficult to read the subtitles at the bottom of the frame that are oriented towards the viewer, she squeezes between us and the subtitles to better connect to the world on the other side . . . it's hard to simultaneously read (subtitles) at the bottom of the frame and the expressions of the actors above, so she lifts them up . . . she slips one subtitle into her cleavage, and another into her drink and drinks it" (68).

But there can be a stubborn artisanal pride among subtitlers, who can resist witty innovations like Rozema's. Claire Denis describes a scene in *Vendredi Soir* (2002) where her main character is watching, from inside her car, a couple in a café. "She sees them having a conversation, but can barely hear what they say . . . the subtitles, however, present this dialogue with absolute clarity" (75). When Denis, concerned about this evident mismatch, asked the subtitler whether the text could be presented with missing letters or words—to reflect her character's experience of partial comprehension—she got a flat denial. To the guild mentality and pride in workmanship of this subtitler, it's all or nothing at all. Even so, the kind of mismatch he insisted obdurately on preserving could in principle be played upon to creative effect, if you turned it around. (Denis admits that at the time when this incident took place, she was new to directing, and didn't think she had the authority to face him down.)

Another example of creativity: in Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Surname Viet, Given Name Nam* (1989), the Vietnamese women, in Naficy's words, "speak in a highly accented English that is out of sync. Although these women are subtitled, the subtitling is also deliberately out of sync . . . The subtitles do

not exactly match what the women are saying" (145). There are evident possibilities here.

Egoyan and Balfour indicate in their introduction that "every film is a foreign film—foreign to some audience somewhere, and not simply in terms of language" (21). Foreignness need have nothing to do with "the exotic," in the National Geographic sense of the term. Subtitles situate the spectator in a particular way. Reading them, we are at once familiarized and defamiliarized with what they say, and what they represent, for the latter goes beyond the lexical or the verbal. Béhor again: "our task as subtitlers is to create subliminal subtitles so in sync with the mood and rhythm of the movie that the audience isn't even aware it is reading. We want *not* to be noticed" (85). In this sense, film subtitles have something in common with film music, but also have something in common with the experience of exile. Not for nothing are diaspora and deterritorialization the subjects of Hamid Naficy's "Epistolarity and Textuality in Accented Films." Naficy is on message: "the sound track, like the image track (of the film) involves mediations, translations, and representational practices that push the sound into the realm of ideology, as something that is produced, not something that merely emanates" (ibid.). At this point, we are are obliged to ponder what *Hollywood* thinks "Foreignness" consists in. John Mowitt: "Though it was formed in 1927, and originally conceived as an international organization, the American Academy of Motion Pictures Arts and Sciences (AMPAS) did not begin to officially acknowledge what came to be known as 'foreign language films' until Vittorio de Sica's 'Shoeshine' (1946) was brought to its attention in 1948," at which point a new disciplinary and regulatory configuration came to the fore, "a configuration in which films are characterized as being made 'in' certain languages (English serves as the 'unmarked' term) and destined for a specific form of exhibition (in a commercial theatre, in a certain country, during a particular business cycle)" (384). A foreign film is deemed foreign "not by virtue of what it *looks* like, but by virtue of what it *sounds* like" (367). Even so, *The Harder They Come* was in 1972 declared ineligible for an Academy Award "because 'calypso' (what might also be called Creole) was [defined as] an English dialect, and thus [*The Harder They Come*] was not made in a language other than English" (390). The mere fact that it was—yes!—*subtitled* when exhibited in the U.S. counted for nothing in this odd, loaded computation.

Again, in "requiring that foreign language films be 3,000 feet in length [none of that alien metrication here], made by companies, shown in commercial theatres, and produced for profit, AMPAS was explicitly intervening in the domain of indigenous cultural practices not only to impose the capitalist logic of standardization, but also, in effect, to . . . situate foreignness on the soundtrack" (397–98). The award for best foreign language film, Mowitt concludes provocatively, "is not *for* something foreign, it *is* something foreign" (386). Brenda Longfellow: "Foreignness . . . was constructed through a concept of epic time in which the ethnographic subject was considered along the scale of evolution as an earlier, primitive . . . incarnation of European man, the implicit standard by which difference was measured and embalmed. Cast as noble savage by the romanticism that has always pervaded the discipline, the ethnographic subject came to act as the symbolic repository for all that modernity had torn from the West: animal sensuality, a spiritual oneness with nature" (336). We may at this point appear to be back in territory staked out by Ruby Rich. But in truth we never really left it.

"The separation of image and voice," Longfellow goes on, "in ethnographic films from 1930 to 1970, where voice is ascribed to the white European investigator and image to the bodies of colonial others, reiterates, morphologically, the political binaries of colonialism: mind *versus* body, subject *versus* object, us *versus* them" (338). Two observations seem apposite here. First, the mock-ethnographic films of Jean Rouch (which, for the record, were made prior to 1970) consciously reverse these priorities to hilarious effect. Remember the black colonized measuring with calipers the cranial capacities of white Parisians on the streets of Paris? The second observation is more ominous. It is that Longfellow's unreversed priorities are not restricted to ethnographic films anyway. Think only of Spielberg's *Amistad* (1997), where black bodies are exoticized and eroticized.

Nobody who has read this book will ever take subtitles for granted again.

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Citizen Spy: Television, Espionage, and Cold War Culture

By Michael Kackman. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005. $57.00 cloth; $18.95 paper. 236 pages.

"The Cold War" was a misnomer, neither always cold nor always a war. Not even coherent enough to justify the definite article, "the," its dualities were prolific. So multifarious were the interpretations of "containment," the United States' prevalent Cold War strategy over the course of roughly forty years, that it consisted concurrently of offensive and defensive activities having military, diplomatic, economic, and cultural dimensions. Containment's rubric covered equally domestic surveillance and domestic self-discipline, armed intervention and covert activity. Figured in American discourse as an all-embracing struggle between eternal good and eternal evil, containment rendered any perceived defeat or perception of weakness or compromise as, potentially, the beginning of a scenario that could conclude in U.S. defeat and destruction. Hence Cold Warriors, grand and petty, promoted relentless border maintenance, restaging—sometimes with the aura of near-mathematical precision—proofs of loyalty, theorems of truth, tests of complicity, so as to identify with exponential (albeit always inadequate) surety the true American citizen.

The citizen, however, as Michael Kackman explains in his astute and timely book, is the site of numerous contradictions that surround the concept of nationhood. "While discourses of nationalism often insist," Kackman points out, "that the nation is an inherent, natural expression of collective will and sentiment, it is continually being reshaped and reformed" (xxxii). At the border between "narratives of internal coherence and externalized difference" (xxxii) lies the tenuous concept of the state. Citizens, those subjects of regulation and agents of self-regulation, comply with the state's authority while simultaneously providing the mandate for that authority. While one could construe this symbiotic relationship as a system of checks and balances, in effect it reveals a contradiction in the notion of democratic governance made most apparent by the polarizations of loyalty effected in the marginal case of a totalizing and (apparently) unending war. Television was the normative social apparatus, *sine qua non*, of a nation in that marginal condition, a point made by Kachman's insightful study of the tensions surrounding the notion of citizen exposed implicitly by television and especially by the regulated and regulatory aspects of television's espionage narratives that, Kackman shows, "provide a rich opportunity to explore television's participation in the formation of a national culture" (xxxv).

The Man Called X (1956), a syndicated show ostensibly based on the exploits of an actual spy involved in American espionage abroad, was one of a number of 1950s shows that employed "conventions of documentary realism to craft a discursive community of common national concern" (21). Each episode ended in a direct address that positioned actor Barry Sullivan to reach beyond his role as "X" in enlisting the viewer's aid in fighting Communism. "Here, the fictional narrative, the governmental institution, the television apparatus, the citizen-actor, and the citizen viewer converge, united by a common American nationalism that blends geopolitics with everyday life" (23). A similar appeal surrounds *I Led Three Lives* (1953–56), based on the exploits of Herbert Philbrick, an actual double agent. This series crucially foregrounds Philbrick's "third" life as the normative, generically suburban, middle-class family man. Because the majority of the series' 117 episodes feature powerful Communist women who usually command "a clan of ineffective, subservient male comrades" (32), while female FBI agents are never seen, the series manifests the gendered ideology of containment. Especially, given the series' emphasis on the domestic scene, Philbrick's masculinity accrues from his ability to protect his domestic setting. The series, furthermore, makes Philbrick's "organization man" prowess crucial to his dual role as successful counter-spy and protector of the family by regularly illustrating his ability to mediate successfully between two "dramatically different bureaucracies" (32).

Kackman thus shows that television constructed sites of identification that wove tightly the earmarks of quotidian 1950s middle-classdom with the narrative dynamics of global conflict. He is equally deft at demonstrating that the subsequent mutations of TV espionage series revealed nuanced redefinitions of the Cold War in the popular imaginary. The shift from documentarian to fictional spy shows, typified by *Behind Closed Doors* (1958–59) and *World of Giants* (1960—about a six-inch-tall secret agent who usually traveled in his partner's briefcase), marked not only the waning of McCarthyist paranoia but also a shift in the organization of televisual representation. Whereas in its incipience television stressed its role as conduit to reality, by the end of the 1950s the industry was willing to engage more openly its role in providing escapist entertainment. In this context, Kackman makes clear, increasing internationalism "directly influenced spy programs, which were rapidly detaching themselves from official discourses of state power" (72). Thus the parodic series, *Man from U.N.C.L.E.* (1964–68) and *Get Smart* (1965–70), "didn't evacuate espionage of its ability to speak of and about citizenship . . . Instead, they contributed to a generalized re-opening of cultural conversations about the linkages of state power to popular culture" (112).

The next major turn in espionage programming was *I Spy* (1965–68), the first non-comedy television series to feature a black star, Bill Cosby, who along with co-star Robert Culp traveled the world as U.S. undercover agents. Although *I Spy* retained some of *Man from U.N.C.L.E.*'s glib tone, its mission was a serious promotion of the United States as egalitarian and global. Because Cosby's character "is figured as a key Cold War emissary [whose] most important missions are those in which he blunts the political reach of pan-Africanism" (117), the show simultaneously "tended to suppress civil rights political struggles [while] it nonetheless placed African Americans at the heart of U.S. Cold War politics" (143). In promoting tourism as well as Americanism, *I Spy* revealed as well the consumerist aspect of containment, just as its

thematic successor, *Mission Impossible* (1966–73) revealed the technocratic aspects. Not just an advocate of consumerism but also, potentially, a commodity for international distribution, *Mission Impossible* "avoided the historical specificity of the 1950s semi-documentary [substituting] a kind of cultural and technological realism" (146). In this regard, *Mission Impossible* represents the culmination of the Cold War espionage genre; in "evacuating its agents of individual identity, they become pure expressions of state power" (148).

Kackman's argument is bolstered throughout by an ample array of very convincing close readings that provide a good sense of the narratives proliferated by a new medium, one that, in an astonishingly short time, had created a public space capable of occupying on a regular, periodic basis the imagination of a majority of all American citizens. An adequate understanding of ideology in the age of technological mediation requires, I think, an extensive and multifaceted examination of the unique public space television created during the four decades when two phenomena that no longer exist—network domination and the Cold War—coincided. In examining, as Kackman puts it, "the nature and demands of citizenship in a time of constraint" (185), *Citizen Spy* makes a valuable contribution to this important project.

ALAN NADEL, William T. Bryan Chair of American Literature at the University of Kentucky, is author of *Television in Black-and-White America: Race and National Identity* (University Press of Kansas, 2005).
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Hollywood's West: The American Frontier in Film, Television, and History

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There's an irony, if not a particularly happy one for fans of the genre, in the fact that there are now more books being published about the Western than there are Western movies coming out of Hollywood. Some of these volumes, like *Hollywood's West*, offer a perspective derived from historical or sociological studies, rather than from the film studies perspective with which *Film Quarterly* readers will be more familiar. In principle, this is all to the good. Clearly, Westerns are in a sense "about" history, and if professional historians can elucidate exactly in what sense, then we may all profit.

The essays in *Hollywood's West* result from a conference hosted by *Film and History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies* in 2002. They cover a wide range of topics. Some concern themselves with little-explored aspects of the genre, including J. E. Smyth's essay on *Cimarron* (1930—for sixty years the only Western to win the Oscar for best picture), or Cynthia J. Miller's discussion of the generic hybrids produced by Jed Buell, including *The Terror of Tiny Town* (1938), with its all-midget cast, and *Harlem on the Prairie* (1937), starring black singer Herb Jeffries. In similar vein, John Shelton Lawrence discusses the Lone Ranger and David Pierson analyses the made-for-TV Westerns of TNT, which have so far received little attention elsewhere.

Other topics are more mainstream. Matthew J. Costello writes about *High Noon* (1952) in the context of the Cold War, a subject recently worked over by Stanley Corkin in his book *Cowboys as Cold Warriors* (Atheneum, 2004), as well as by Richard Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation* (Temple University Press, 1992), and by Phillip Drummond in his BFI Film Classic on the film, published in 1997 (but surprisingly not mentioned in Costello's bibliography). As we would expect, there are a couple of articles about women in the Western, John Parrris Springer discussing *Red River* (1947) in that context, and Winona Howe dealing with *The Professionals* (1966). There are also some observant remarks by Kathleen A. McDonough on how women in Ford's cavalry Westerns are initiated into support for a masculine code of honour, in contrast to their sisters in other Westerns (like *Shane* [1952]) who attempt to domesticate the hero's wildness.

The problem, unfortunately, with some of the essays in the book is that, contrary to the title of the journal which inspired the conference, they aren't very interdisciplinary. They don't show much awareness of the analytic strategies developed within film studies, preferring instead to reduce films, by means of a plot summary, to a fairly banal historical proposition, which is then "placed" in relation to a more generalized discourse about American history. This has the effect of evacuating from the films most of what makes them interesting. And in reducing them to such formulaic historical statements, the authors do not always avoid short-circuiting the complex articulations between culture and society. Thus McDonough observes that John Ford's portrayal of Indians in *Fort Apache* (1948) and *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949) displays a hopeful and constructive attitude towards dealing with international hostilities. But the last film in the "cavalry trilogy" apparently represents a reversion to a more right-wing attitude, which is then directly attributed to shifts in international relations: "That the Indians in *Rio Grande* are once again savages reflects the diminishing hopes for lasting peace as tension grew throughout the world" (112).

Yet the chronology doesn't quite fit. The more optimistic *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* was released in October 1949, over a year after the Berlin airlift began in June 1948, an event cited by McDonough as responsible for crucially upping international tension. She claims that the anti-Indian *Rio Grande*, released in November 1950, registers the further deterioration in relations between the U.S. and the Communist bloc, and it's true that the Korean War broke out in June 1950. But can we credit Ford with mapping so acutely the twists and turns of international relations? Or is it more likely, as Joseph McBride thinks in his biography *Searching for John Ford* (St Martin's Press, 2001), that the director's more hawkish stance in the later film was mainly due to his hiring of the "archconservative" James Kevin McGuinness rather than the liberal Frank Nugent? A simple, determinist view of the relations between film and history also fails to do justice to the complex contradictions in Ford's own artistic personality.

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Matthew R. Turner in his discussion of the parody Western. Speaking of *Blazing Saddles* (1974), he claims that the "film's deconstructionist techniques reflect the widespread turmoil of a nation dealing with Vietnam and Watergate. Just as people were questioning the things they once thought were fixed, [Mel] Brooks questions and undermines every established convention of the Western" (224). But can the relationship between the two sets of phenomena be quite so simple as this? And what is the exact meaning of the word "reflects" here? As in a mirror, an exact replication? If so, by what institutional and artistic mechanisms is such a remarkable identity secured? Is politics the cause of what happens in the cinema, or is each of them an effect, produced by a common cause (which is essentially the case argued by Slotkin)?

Fortunately this anthology includes two outstanding essays which set up a much more complex and interesting set of relationships between cinema and history. Joanna Hearne's contribution, "The 'Ache for Home': Assimilation and Separation in Anthony Mann's *Devil's Doorway*," is a detailed and knowledgeable discussion of how the politics of the U.S. government's relations with its indigenous peoples work their way into Mann's film, and others of the period such as *Broken Arrow* (1950) which center on the conflict between whites and Indians. One of the most valuable things Hearne does is to show that this conflict is not best viewed as a perennial, unchanging background within which films are set (as the Indian himself is often seen as an immutable essence), but has its own history, to which particular films can be related.

Alexandra Keller's essay, "Historical Discourse and American Identity in American Westerns since the Reagan Era," like Hearne's, pays attention to the insights of film studies into how films make their meaning. She has a sophisticated understanding of how such Westerns as *Dances With Wolves* (1990), *Walker* (1987), and *Tombstone* (1993) exhibit a different stance towards issues of historical authenticity. *Dances With Wolves*, for example, is an exercise in nostalgia because it fails to problematize historiographic method. It tries merely to picture the past without interrogating the way in which that past is constructed. (Keller, incidentally, also had an excellent essay in Janet Walker's anthology *Westerns: Films Through History*, published in 2001 by Routledge in the AFI Film Readers series, a volume covering somewhat similar ground to *Hollywood's West*, but written by film specialists.)

Overall, then, this is a collection that contains much of use and something of real value, but one which might have profited from a more searching interrogation of what history is and how it is told, besides a greater knowledge of what film studies have already said about such questions. The general introduction by the editors does not shed much light on these issues, and contains a couple of errors. Surely by now no one believes, as they assert, that Iron Eyes Cody was a Cherokee? The picture on p. 22 is of Shirley Temple, not Joanne Dru. And are they really sure that *Thelma and Louise* (1991) was shot in Monument Valley? I think they will find it was not.

EDWARD BUSCOMBE is the author of three volumes on Westerns in the BFI Film Classics series.

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Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture

By Alison Landsberg. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. $62.50 cloth; $25.50 paper. 215 pages.

Prosthetic Memory is a provocative text that engages with mass culture and its reflections on historical trauma. In combining commentary on literature, comic books, television, museums, and most frequently, popular film, Alison Landsberg mounts an argument in favor of a politically progressive understanding of mass culture that challenges much of the twentieth-century theoretical literature on the topic. Her book represents a bold effort to redeem mass culture from the systems of control to which it has been doomed by many commentators—most famously, Theodor Adorno. Landsberg argues that mass culture can implant new memories in the viewer/reader/spectator, as it literally causes real emotional experiences of empathy and affect that, through the texts, are connected rhetorically to the historical traumas that they depict. Our experiences with these texts leave behind "prosthetic memories" of the traumas that they represent, therefore allowing us a special kind of mediated access to histories that we have not literally lived.

The majority of the stories and situations that Landsberg describes engage with significant events of public trauma from twentieth-century history (particularly as they impact the United States). The author discusses texts that reflect upon immigration, slavery, and the holocaust in the context of mass-cultural narratives. Landsberg's primary question here however is not, *what do the texts say*? But rather, *what do they do*? In her discussion of the TV series *Roots* (1977) or the comic book *Maus*, Landsberg is concerned with explaining the work's intellectual and affective force and then, by extension, its capacity to change how we think and feel about the subject that it represents. In this sense, *Prosthetic Memory* is primarily about defining a particular model of spectatorship that produces a real, experiential type of knowledge-acquisition, which differs markedly from notions of aesthetic experience that describe this interaction between subject and mass-cultural text as primarily escapist. In her discussion of slavery and the holocaust in American memory, Landsberg discusses Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and Steven Spielberg's *Schlinder's List* (1993) in addition to *Roots* and *Maus*. This wide-ranging combination of mass-cultural objects allows Landsberg to discuss new kinds of alternative memory production and knowledge transference, ones that are more "experiential" and affective than what one might encounter with, for example, a history textbook.

The author draws attention to mass-cultural objects that convey their messages through various kinds of emotional and experiential transfer; the fictions create new memories in the viewer through what Landsberg calls, following Freud, their "transferential spaces" (23). In one variety of this affective use of fiction, *Roots* allows white viewers, in Landsberg's words, "to see the world through black eyes" (83). For Landsberg, spectatorial identification is one of the most significant

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devices utilized by mass culture. In relation to *Schindler's List*, Landsberg suggests that, "If the film gives an individual spectator a way of inhabiting, even temporarily, a body that lacks the privilege or agency of her own body, then it might ultimately affect how she will act and the kinds of decisions that she will make in the future" (125). So, if the viewer of *Schindler's List* experiences some threat to her agency then it may change how she acts *outside* of the movie theater. This "burning in" of experience is an aspect of our engagement with mass culture that Landsberg effectively recognizes, describes, and celebrates. Movies change us. It is Landsberg's intention here to explain one particular way in which this happens.

In terms of our own viewing experiences, we must necessarily wonder how they align with Landsberg's explanation above. To what extent does her description of spectator identification, with its corresponding *actual* fear, really describe what is going when we watch a commercial fiction like *Roots* or *Schindler's List*? Jean-Luc Godard famously attacked Spielberg's film for its "Hollywoodization" of historical trauma and its commercial gloss. (Art Spiegelman faced similar criticisms, as Landsberg mentions.) Do the prosthetic memories that *Schlinder's List* produces result from a convincing dramatic connection to the indescribable horrors of the holocaust, or are they consequences of the film's astute manipulation of the emotional algebra of melodrama? Does such a distinction matter for the production of prosthetic memory? Maybe these questions are not immediately relevant, since the author is not concerned with qualitative judgments. However, one must admit, at times it is hard to get past our critical responses to mass culture in order to reach the instrumental understanding that Landsberg encourages in this text. Maybe her book, then, is not an endorsement of a group of texts, but of a particular theoretical approach to thinking about and using mass culture.

The world that Landsberg envisions for the consumer of mass-culture objects is one in which we accept the possibility for new kinds of memory, without differentiating between "authentic" and "inauthentic" experience. In her model, we would act upon the knowledge that we acquire in our interactions with mass culture and use the resultant bank of "prosthetic memory" towards socially productive ends. Landsberg argues that the relatively new technologies of mass culture, including television, film, experiential museums, and the Internet, "have made it increasingly possible to *experience* an event or a past without having lived through it" (48). As a result, through the interaction with these technologies, we can have close, emotional, even bodily connections with histories that are not authentically our own. In this optimistic interpretation of mass culture we can escape the essentialisms of race, class, and gender and thus empathize with people whose historical circumstances are entirely different from those into which we were born. So *Prosthetic Memory* is about creatively "negotiating distances" (135) in the real world through our experiences with fictions.

According to Landsberg, mass culture has transformed something fundamental to the world. She writes, "With these new technologies, what counts as 'real' experience has changed" (48). She argues that in our world, as in the science fiction spaces of *Total Recall* (1990) and *Blade Runner* (1982), two films that she discusses at some length, the question of a memory's authenticity ultimately is not terribly important. What matters, in her reading of these films, as in her proposal for our engagement with mass culture, is righteous behavior. However, isn't there a sense in which such a subversion of authenticity might affect the truth claims that we can make about our own lives, and therefore about the values of our actions? Isn't the ontological difference between living through the Civil War and experiencing the Clone Wars (in a movie theater) not one of degree, but of kind? Surely authenticity must have *some* relevance. A coherent discussion of history depends upon it. However, this is not to say that history cannot be interestingly and meaningfully interpreted and augmented by our experiences with fiction, because as Landsberg convincingly argues, these experiences too are real. We respond to fictions and they infuse themselves into our lives. *Prosthetic Memory* gives us one explanation of how this might happen.

CARLOS KASE is a doctoral student in the Critical Studies Department in the School of Cinema-Television at the University of Southern California.

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ANALYSIS AND PRACTICE

The Digital Film Event

By Trinh T. Minh-ha. New York: Routledge, 2005. $95.00 cloth; $28.95 paper. 219 pages.

The Digital Film Event, like *Framer Framed* (Routledge, 1992) and *Cinema-Interval* (Routledge, 1999), consists of a collection of interviews with filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha and documents (scripts, sketches) related to her films and media installations. The interviews in *Digital Film Event* focus primarily on Trinh's first digital film, *The Fourth Dimension* (2001), a meditation on Japan and its art, culture, rituals, and daily life. The interviews are accompanied by the script and scores of images from the film, some in color. Though these materials help clarify the interviews, readers will need to have seen the film itself, available from Women Make Movies, in order to make sense of Trinh's somewhat elliptical, philosophically enigmatic statements. The volume also includes brief discussions of three video installations: *Nothing But Ways* (1999, with Lynn Kirby), a Vienna Secession exhibition of her films (2001), and *The Desert is Watching* (2003, with Jean-Paul Bourdier).

Trinh refers to all of her works as "events"—or, more properly, "boundary events" (because they inhabit the spaces between traditional boundaries, combining elements of documentary, fiction, and experimental film). The title of her latest book thus refers to both a new event-space—that of the digital film—and to the book itself which is presented as

devices utilized by mass culture. In relation to *Schindler's List*, Landsberg suggests that, "If the film gives an individual spectator a way of inhabiting, even temporarily, a body that lacks the privilege or agency of her own body, then it might ultimately affect how she will act and the kinds of decisions that she will make in the future" (125). So, if the viewer of *Schindler's List* experiences some threat to her agency then it may change how she acts *outside* of the movie theater. This "burning in" of experience is an aspect of our engagement with mass culture that Landsberg effectively recognizes, describes, and celebrates. Movies change us. It is Landsberg's intention here to explain one particular way in which this happens.

In terms of our own viewing experiences, we must necessarily wonder how they align with Landsberg's explanation above. To what extent does her description of spectator identification, with its corresponding *actual* fear, really describe what is going when we watch a commercial fiction like *Roots* or *Schindler's List*? Jean-Luc Godard famously attacked Spielberg's film for its "Hollywoodization" of historical trauma and its commercial gloss. (Art Spiegelman faced similar criticisms, as Landsberg mentions.) Do the prosthetic memories that *Schlinder's List* produces result from a convincing dramatic connection to the indescribable horrors of the holocaust, or are they consequences of the film's astute manipulation of the emotional algebra of melodrama? Does such a distinction matter for the production of prosthetic memory? Maybe these questions are not immediately relevant, since the author is not concerned with qualitative judgments. However, one must admit, at times it is hard to get past our critical responses to mass culture in order to reach the instrumental understanding that Landsberg encourages in this text. Maybe her book, then, is not an endorsement of a group of texts, but of a particular theoretical approach to thinking about and using mass culture.

The world that Landsberg envisions for the consumer of mass-culture objects is one in which we accept the possibility for new kinds of memory, without differentiating between "authentic" and "inauthentic" experience. In her model, we would act upon the knowledge that we acquire in our interactions with mass culture and use the resultant bank of "prosthetic memory" towards socially productive ends. Landsberg argues that the relatively new technologies of mass culture, including television, film, experiential museums, and the Internet, "have made it increasingly possible to *experience* an event or a past without having lived through it" (48). As a result, through the interaction with these technologies, we can have close, emotional, even bodily connections with histories that are not authentically our own. In this optimistic interpretation of mass culture we can escape the essentialisms of race, class, and gender and thus empathize with people whose historical circumstances are entirely different from those into which we were born. So *Prosthetic Memory* is about creatively "negotiating distances" (135) in the real world through our experiences with fictions.

According to Landsberg, mass culture has transformed something fundamental to the world. She writes, "With these new technologies, what counts as 'real' experience has changed" (48). She argues that in our world, as in the science fiction spaces of *Total Recall* (1990) and *Blade Runner* (1982), two films that she discusses at some length, the question of a memory's authenticity ultimately is not terribly important. What matters, in her reading of these films, as in her proposal for our engagement with mass culture, is righteous behavior. However, isn't there a sense in which such a subversion of authenticity might affect the truth claims that we can make about our own lives, and therefore about the values of our actions? Isn't the ontological difference between living through the Civil War and experiencing the Clone Wars (in a movie theater) not one of degree, but of kind? Surely authenticity must have *some* relevance. A coherent discussion of history depends upon it. However, this is not to say that history cannot be interestingly and meaningfully interpreted and augmented by our experiences with fiction, because as Landsberg convincingly argues, these experiences too are real. We respond to fictions and they infuse themselves into our lives. *Prosthetic Memory* gives us one explanation of how this might happen.

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ANALYSIS AND PRACTICE

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Trinh refers to all of her works as "events"—or, more properly, "boundary events" (because they inhabit the spaces between traditional boundaries, combining elements of documentary, fiction, and experimental film). The title of her latest book thus refers to both a new event-space—that of the digital film—and to the book itself which is presented as

a "textual installation" in which the reader moves through a variety of verbal and visual texts.

For Trinh, digital film (or D-film) is the perfect instance of a boundary event—it is neither film nor video, but exists in a space between the two. By this, Trinh does not just mean that D-film is digital while film and video are analogue, but that digital film differs from analogue formats in its inherent mutability. In this respect, digital technology expands the traditional pictorial fixity of film and video. Trinh is also fascinated by the way digital technology "displaces the fixed boundaries between film and animation or computer games" (6). Trinh, like Lev Manovich, sees D-film as a kind of animation and the D-image as a point of departure for further manipulation. But for Trinh, this "sculpting" of the image is not an end in itself—not a special effect designed to defamiliarize observable phenomena or to stimulate retinal pleasure. Trinh dismisses the digital effects (the disfiguring, animating, morphing, and trans-shaping of the image) that some experimental filmmakers have engaged in, likening those experiments to the special effects of Hollywood blockbusters. "Digital effects that decompose and disintegrate the image abound in new media works and become an end in themselves" (37), she says. Instead, digital manipulability needs to be put to the service of revealing the mutability that, according to Trinh's Taoist philosophy, informs the unseen dimension of reality itself.

The sorts of digital manipulation Trinh employs are about as far from special effects as one could imagine. *The Fourth Dimension* uses mobile internal frames, for example, to set an oblong image in play with the four borders of the frame from which it ricochets like a bullet (or bullet train, one of the film's dominant image-metaphors for Japan). Drawing on the compositing features of digital technology, Trinh also adds layers of color to the image. These horizontal and vertical rectangles of color resemble curtains that open and close from side to side or top to bottom. Like the ricocheting image, the color layers also function as internal frames. In both instances, digital manipulation emphasizes the images as *images*. Trinh is not showing us the reality of Japan but images of Japan. The images tell us something about Japan—the ordering of its interior spaces within a finite exterior border—but it does so on the level of discursive commentary by the film itself rather than by documentary observation. Just as important, for Trinh, is the fact that these digital techniques speak to her relation, as filmmaker, to these images.

Together, *The Digital Film Event* and *The Fourth Dimension* elaborate a metaphor of vision and perception in the digital age. In digital's primal scene, the individual sits immobile at the computer keyboard and travels at the speed of light through cyberspace. For Trinh, this state of consciousness is unique to digital technology. In D-film's primal scene, the filmmaker sits at the window of her non-linear digital editing console, "'dilating and sculpting time' with a digital machine vision" (3).

In *The Fourth Dimension*, on the bullet train, passengers, like the film's viewers, sit immobile, yet move at hyper-speed. Through the train window, they see images of the "vast rhythms of life" (7). At the same time, the movement of the train is regulated, Trinh's voiceover narration tells us, "by a computer brain in Tokyo." Meanwhile, Trinh sits immobile before her window—the computer screen—on which is displayed the film's myriad moving images. The image of the bullet train, Trinh tells us, summons up the speed of modernity; her film is a digital machine that "speeds through Japan's likeness." In other words, the film, in both its content and its form, explores the features of digital consciousness—speed, mobility, and virtuality.

The electronic age brings with it a crisis in terms of the physical dimensions of both time and space, rendering them virtual. In D-film, Trinh notes, time is liquid: "digital technology offers the possibility of working intensely with time and with the indefinite coexisting layers of past, present, and future" (10). Digital technology allows filmmakers "to break away from the dominance of linear time . . . allowing us effortless fluidity in time" (63). All times exist at once.

Space is emptied out of its physical substance and "reduced almost to zero." Quoting Paul Virilio's *The Lost Dimension* (1983; Semiotext(e), 1991), Trinh suggests that "the crisis of the physical dimension in the age of telecommunications is apparently a crisis of substantive, continuous, homogenous space. What one has instead is a discontinuous, heterogeneous space in which the accidental becomes essential" (10). Filmmakers regularly *construct* time and space—primarily through editing techniques that establish temporal and spatial relations between shots. Trinh's editing refuses to establish those relations in terms of any linear, temporal, and spatial continuity. Instead, she edits in such a way as to question normative senses of time and space, and to promote new ways of seeing made possible by new imaging and editing technologies.

For Trinh, digital technology transforms space into time—the fourth dimension of her film's title. The charge-coupled devices/sensors in digital cameras scan profilmic spaces, translating them into numerical data—or "datascapes"—that are recorded successively on disc or magnetic tape. What was once space is now temporal sequence. Space becomes time.

Trinh's interviews return repeatedly to the concept of time. *The Fourth Dimension* is about time. It's about the time created by digital technology that, in its effortless fluidity, permits "us to break away from the dominance of linear time," technology that processes data "at the speed of light" (4, 66). It's about the time of modernity—what Trinh calls "train time"—and the time of tradition—"Noh time." It's about the time of ritual in which past and present merge. As Trinh suggests, the film is about "musical, historical, [and] sociopolitical time, as well as montage time, optical time; the time of festivities, of traveling, of witnessing, and of viewing; the time, so to speak, of both electronic and spiritual light" (74). In the new temporal-spatial dimension of D-cinema, the electronic and the spiritual are not opposed but interdependent. Digital technology enables Trinh to "create different time-spaces that expose or turn to advantage the fissures, gaps and lapses of the system" (130). What is revealed is that

"the objective reality underneath the uncertain world of appearances" is "no more or no less than a reality effect" (4). All is illusion and reality is the greatest illusion of all.

This book of interviews begins with a reference to Lao Tzu and a question about the relation of being and nonbeing to digital technology. Lao Tzu says, "We work with being, but nonbeing is what we use" (3). Trinh rereads this paradox for us as an insight into the continuous appearance and disappearance that underlies the formation of the digital image. It is *there* and, at the same time, *not there* in ways that photochemical images are not. But then Trinh immediately extends her reading. "In today's electronic space of computerized realities, the sage's word would fare well, for one can hear in them all at once: the practical voice of ancient wisdom, the dissenting voice of postcoloniality, and the visionary voice of technology" (3).

In a world of intervals—spaces between things—Trinh has the unique ability to connect things and to articulate their interdependence. Presence requires absence, something nothing, reality illusion, and being nonbeing. Trinh's perspective enables her to shed considerable light on the way digital technology "impacts upon the foundations of our knowledge and upon our perceptions of the world" (4).

JOHN BELTON held a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2005–06 to write a book on digital cinema.

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Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging

By David Bordwell. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. $60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 326 pages.

As is the case with every new Bordwell book reaching this side of the ocean, *Figures Traced in Light* makes us feel as though we have received a long and elaborate postcard from a friend who has gone on an expedition to some *terra incognita*. This latest communication, dated 2005, is excellent: the traveler's health is flourishing and the natives are welcoming; the mail is indeed euphoric—one feels that the explorer is particularly happy with what he has encountered though, at the same time, slightly melancholic because in the course of his exploration he has closed off almost as many paths as he has opened up.

The title is telling: it is a treatise on staging in film. To anyone who is at all familiar with Bordwell's work, "treatise" does not mean a dry theoretical compendium, but the vertiginously erudite and detailed study of cinematic examples, taken from the immense body of works that this scholar has encountered over the course of thirty years. Four of the book's six chapters are devoted to single filmmakers: Feuillade, Mizoguchi, Angelopoulos, Hou—a choice that in itself reveals many of the intentions at play here. Two Europeans, two Asians, and no American (but American directors, who are no longer the kings of staging, have been extensively studied elsewhere, notably in the monumental and definitive *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, co-written twenty years ago with Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson). A primitive, a classicist, a modern, a postmodern (unless he is neomodern). Two artists often commented upon (Mizoguchi and Angelopoulos), but rarely in such concrete and analytical fashion; a critics' darling (Hou), whose elegant style has never been described with much precision; and a great director (Feuillade), who until now had seemed to interest only late Surrealists, for the happy few, a choice demonstrating that staging is a universal dimension of narrative cinema, to be found at the beginning as well as at the end of its history. Bordwell's book presents itself as a rehabilitation of the notion of staging that the triumph of montage had apparently condemned to oblivion. There is an element of nostalgia: Bordwell regrets that too few filmmakers still know about the expressive virtue of mise-en-scène—i. e., the staging of bodies, the managing of expressions, postures, gestures—and that almost no one cares about its narrative virtue, which nevertheless equals that of montage, though arguably with greater possibilities of subtlety and elegance. "Could any director today execute the opening of [Feuillade's] *Les Vampires*?" No, of course not.

This complaint is well-known; it began, at least, with Godard's *Tout va bien* (1972) and the statement that nobody knows any more how to frame a scene like Eisenstein. The most valuable part of David Bordwell's book is that, while nourishing this complaint by producing detailed and argumentative proof to sustain it, he immediately suggests that nothing has been definitively lost: if staging is not any more the common criterion that measures the value of a film artist, it has not all the same vanished altogether. The choice of Angelopoulos and Hou—two aging artists, it is true—is one of the best that could be imagined, since their critical and public reputation is precisely founded on their visible art of the occupation of space and on their mastery of framing. The ultimate aim is to demonstrate that, in spite of the growing uniformity of world cinema, in spite of the appearance of so-called national (or worse, "ethnic") styles, in spite of the soft bullying of "cultural studies," it remains possible and fruitful to consider film art in formal terms. Here we have the well-known *refrain* of the "neoformalist" school, and the reader is not too surprised to find a new plea in this vein, in the last chapter of the book. But was it absolutely necessary to reaffirm a well-known methodological creed, whose exciting results during the last thirty years speak abundantly by themselves? Certainly, the book's range depends less on methodology than, as usual, on the quality of the analytical detail.

Anyone familiar with Bordwell—friend or foe—acknowledges his eminent virtue, never to discuss a film without having dissected it in minute detail on a flatbed viewing machine (and without having produced meanwhile a great number of stills). This book is no exception, and staging is analyzed here with a degree of precision seldom or never achieved by anyone else. As early as the introductory chapter—which neatly establishes the problem, on the astutely chosen case of meal scenes, with their inherent and infernal difficulty (how can everybody be included in the shot?)—the reader understands that nothing shall be stated that is not referred to a concrete example (here a scene from *O! Soo-jung* [2000], by Hong Sang-soo). Staging is a tool of the narrative

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Of course, the theoretician is never forgotten in the critic's analyses, and the examples are always here to help demonstrate a point. However, the cleverness and agility of the comments never burden Bordwell's respect for the filmic text: no interpretations, or at least no interpretation that would be a mere projection on the film from a general stance. At most, a slight tendency to overestimate the filmmaker's intentionality or his mastery (as early as the very first analysis, that of *O! Soo-jung*, turning a semi-improvised shooting into a masterpiece of calculation and meticulous direction of the slightest gesture). In fact, Bordwell gives way to his theoretical streak in separate pages, between the analytical chapters, where he addresses in passing stylistic and esthetic problems in general, such as: "The cinematic playing space," "Aggressive foregrounds and reticent depths," or "Two ways to dedramatize filmic space."

The definition of staging that is given by Bordwell may seem excessively formal: a problem of putting things in their proper place, and of a transcription of this putting-in-place in the rectangle of the frame. But one must observe first that such is its basic definition, to be found quite early in the first treatises on filmmaking (in particular by the Danish director Urban Gad, who authored as early as 1919 a voluminous treatise, well-known by Bordwell, who has commented on it on several occasions); in simple terms, it opens onto a vast set of complex problems. The critical (and polemical) use of "mise-en-scène" by critics from the 1960s to name a sort of *virtus artistica* of film may have been more vigorous, but at the price of a great imprecision, even of total confusion. Bordwell's book—whose writing is always clear, precise, and warm—has the immense merit of turning back to the only authoritative data: the films and what they show us on the screen. Staging or mise-en-scène is not a concept, not an aesthetic program, not a manifesto (though it could occasionally be one or the other): it is the flesh of a film shot, the very flesh of film, its intimate relationship to what has remained, in spite of all, its true subject—the figuration of human beings in *interesting* states and actions.

David Bordwell's earlier book, *History of Film Style* (Harvard University Press, 1998) often failed, I must confess, to convince me. Its minute description of successive styles seemed to be somewhat abusively disguised as a history (a concept that supposes at least a minimal concern for causality). Paradoxically, *Figures Traced in Light*, which makes no pretence at history-making, is far more convincing on that very ground. From Feuillade to Hong, from Evgenij Bauer to Quentin Tarantino, no genealogy is sketched here; even less does one suppose an essence named "staging," whose contingent incarnations one might trace. If this finally is a historian's work, it is by its amplitude, by its synoptic view of an entire century, which has not by chance been often labeled the century of cinema. In his *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1997–99), Godard has surmised that, of all the inventions of cinema, montage is the most fundamental, inasmuch as it is the most original. With totally different procedures and arguments, Bordwell modestly suggests that this claim was perhaps easier said than proven: in matters of staging also, and in spite of its supposed relation to theater, cinema has left its indelible mark on images.

JACQUES AUMONT teaches the esthetics of film at the University of Paris-3 (Sorbonne Nouvelle) and at EHESS. He runs the Collège d'histoire de l'art cinématographique (Cinémathèque française). His most recent book is *Matière d'images* (Images Modernes, 2005).
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On Film-making: An Introduction to the Craft of the Director

By Alexander Mackendrick, edited by Paul Cronin. New York: Faber and Faber, 2005. $35.00 cloth; $16.00 paper. 336 pages.

It is a rare volume that attempts to address film directing as a profession. There are how-to guides such as *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics* by Michael Rabiger (Focal Press, 3rd edn 2003) and *Directing for Film and Television: A Guide to the Craft* by Christopher Lukas (Allworth Press, rev. edn 2001), which are general texts written by little-known practitioners. When the writer is an acclaimed film director, as in the case of *King Vidor: On Film Making* (David McKay, 1972), *Making Movies* by Sidney Lumet (Bloomsbury, 1995), or *On Filmmaking* by Edward Dmytryk (Focal Press, 1986), they draw on experience culled from a body of work known to, and respected by, the reader. *The Film-Maker's Art* (Basic Books, 1966) by Haig P. Manoogian is of great interest because the legendary NYU professor taught so many now-prominent filmmakers, notably Martin Scorsese.

Both teacher and practitioner, Alexander Mackendrick directed *The Man in the White Suit* (1951), *The Ladykillers* (1955), and *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), subsequently becoming the Dean of the California Institute of the Arts after his retirement, in 1960, as a filmmaker. At CalArts, Mackendrick wrote hundreds of pages of class notes and sketches that formed his curriculum and encapsulated his philosophy on the practical teaching of his craft. Those texts are adroitly compiled here by Paul Cronin, himself a film scholar and maker. The collection begins with a foreword from Scorsese, who explains that after only one hundred years there is little consensus concerning a syllabus for the training of a film director. After Scorsese applauds Mackendrick's pioneering work in the field, Cronin provides a lengthy introduction which covers background and the essential tenets of teachings that stress practice over theory. Cronin pored over all the handouts and notes Mackendrick produced during his academic career before condensing them into a single volume divided into two categories: dramatic construction (the

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Of course, the theoretician is never forgotten in the critic's analyses, and the examples are always here to help demonstrate a point. However, the cleverness and agility of the comments never burden Bordwell's respect for the filmic text: no interpretations, or at least no interpretation that would be a mere projection on the film from a general stance. At most, a slight tendency to overestimate the filmmaker's intentionality or his mastery (as early as the very first analysis, that of *O! Soo-jung*, turning a semi-improvised shooting into a masterpiece of calculation and meticulous direction of the slightest gesture). In fact, Bordwell gives way to his theoretical streak in separate pages, between the analytical chapters, where he addresses in passing stylistic and esthetic problems in general, such as: "The cinematic playing space," "Aggressive foregrounds and reticent depths," or "Two ways to dedramatize filmic space."

The definition of staging that is given by Bordwell may seem excessively formal: a problem of putting things in their proper place, and of a transcription of this putting-in-place in the rectangle of the frame. But one must observe first that such is its basic definition, to be found quite early in the first treatises on filmmaking (in particular by the Danish director Urban Gad, who authored as early as 1919 a voluminous treatise, well-known by Bordwell, who has commented on it on several occasions); in simple terms, it opens onto a vast set of complex problems. The critical (and polemical) use of "mise-en-scène" by critics from the 1960s to name a sort of *virtus artistica* of film may have been more vigorous, but at the price of a great imprecision, even of total confusion. Bordwell's book—whose writing is always clear, precise, and warm—has the immense merit of turning back to the only authoritative data: the films and what they show us on the screen. Staging or mise-en-scène is not a concept, not an aesthetic program, not a manifesto (though it could occasionally be one or the other): it is the flesh of a film shot, the very flesh of film, its intimate relationship to what has remained, in spite of all, its true subject—the figuration of human beings in *interesting* states and actions.

David Bordwell's earlier book, *History of Film Style* (Harvard University Press, 1998) often failed, I must confess, to convince me. Its minute description of successive styles seemed to be somewhat abusively disguised as a history (a concept that supposes at least a minimal concern for causality). Paradoxically, *Figures Traced in Light*, which makes no pretence at history-making, is far more convincing on that very ground. From Feuillade to Hong, from Evgenij Bauer to Quentin Tarantino, no genealogy is sketched here; even less does one suppose an essence named "staging," whose contingent incarnations one might trace. If this finally is a historian's work, it is by its amplitude, by its synoptic view of an entire century, which has not by chance been often labeled the century of cinema. In his *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1997–99), Godard has surmised that, of all the inventions of cinema, montage is the most fundamental, inasmuch as it is the most original. With totally different procedures and arguments, Bordwell modestly suggests that this claim was perhaps easier said than proven: in matters of staging also, and in spite of its supposed relation to theater, cinema has left its indelible mark on images.

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On Film-making: An Introduction to the Craft of the Director

By Alexander Mackendrick, edited by Paul Cronin. New York: Faber and Faber, 2005. $35.00 cloth; $16.00 paper. 336 pages.

It is a rare volume that attempts to address film directing as a profession. There are how-to guides such as *Directing: Film Techniques and Aesthetics* by Michael Rabiger (Focal Press, 3rd edn 2003) and *Directing for Film and Television: A Guide to the Craft* by Christopher Lukas (Allworth Press, rev. edn 2001), which are general texts written by little-known practitioners. When the writer is an acclaimed film director, as in the case of *King Vidor: On Film Making* (David McKay, 1972), *Making Movies* by Sidney Lumet (Bloomsbury, 1995), or *On Filmmaking* by Edward Dmytryk (Focal Press, 1986), they draw on experience culled from a body of work known to, and respected by, the reader. *The Film-Maker's Art* (Basic Books, 1966) by Haig P. Manoogian is of great interest because the legendary NYU professor taught so many now-prominent filmmakers, notably Martin Scorsese.

Both teacher and practitioner, Alexander Mackendrick directed *The Man in the White Suit* (1951), *The Ladykillers* (1955), and *Sweet Smell of Success* (1957), subsequently becoming the Dean of the California Institute of the Arts after his retirement, in 1960, as a filmmaker. At CalArts, Mackendrick wrote hundreds of pages of class notes and sketches that formed his curriculum and encapsulated his philosophy on the practical teaching of his craft. Those texts are adroitly compiled here by Paul Cronin, himself a film scholar and maker. The collection begins with a foreword from Scorsese, who explains that after only one hundred years there is little consensus concerning a syllabus for the training of a film director. After Scorsese applauds Mackendrick's pioneering work in the field, Cronin provides a lengthy introduction which covers background and the essential tenets of teachings that stress practice over theory. Cronin pored over all the handouts and notes Mackendrick produced during his academic career before condensing them into a single volume divided into two categories: dramatic construction (the

creation of a screen story) and film grammar (the rules and properties behind motion-picture production). Cronin proves himself as meticulous as his subject: his annotations, which are printed in the margins, are excellent and, at the beginning of the book, veritably encyclopedic. Mackendrick is especially vigorous on the topic of cinematic dramatic construction. He believed a film story should utilize limited dialogue to create meaning between the words. He judged storytelling by the highest standards, often citing the Ancient Greeks, Shakespeare, or Ibsen. Presenting himself as a classicist, Mackendrick challenged his students to learn the fundamentals of their art and craft and to discover their own future form. This position would be admirable at any point of time but was critical during the essential cinematic decades of the 1960s and 70s when filmmakers were fueled with passionate ideas but often lacked formal categories for their visions. Before the wave of script gurus (Syd Field, Robert McKee, and Linda Seeger), Mackendrick was exploring the writing process by suggesting the student create index cards indicating a simple account of the principal action, outlines as short as four pages or as long as fifty pages, charts of the chain of narrative events, step outlines of an existing film to deconstruct its architecture. And all this planning needed to be bolstered by constant rewriting.

In a series of lectures, the tenets of narrative writing are explored: activity versus action, exposition, dramatic irony, plausibility, structure, suspension of disbelief, creation of subplots, and poetics. A deconstruction of the screenplay for *The Third Man* (1949) includes a character relationship map that analyzes motivation, state of mind, emotions, and personal agendas. A lengthy section is dedicated to the story construction of *Sweet Smell of Success* in which Mackendrick explains his working process including the contributions of Ernest Lehman and Clifford Odets, character breakdowns, and an in-depth dissection of several key scenes following pages from the original screenplay.

The second section is a practical examination of film grammar that connects content with form. Mackendrick presents the rules of film direction with respect for dramatic interpretation, communication with the viewer, and self-expression. Continuing his high-ground approach, Mackendrick references the teachings of Lev Kuleshov, Karel Reisz, and the application of the moving camera of Alfred Hitchcock. Pacing is examined with a sample script page, a step-by-step list of the actions, analysis of the dramatic rhythm, then an annotated storyboard that solves the problem of narrative compression by application of proper shot size, angle, blocking, and camera movement. Directorial point of view and maintaining continuity through understanding the geometry of camera placement and framing is taught with detailed line drawings and intricate notation. Several overhead schematic illustrations clearly demonstrate the relationship of the camera to its subject in several different two-character scene circumstances. Much attention is given to the art and mechanics of covering a scene during production so it can be properly edited. The iconic and deeply emotional taxi scene between Marlon Brando and Rod Steiger from *On the Waterfront* (1954) is a valuable example accompanied by Mackendrick's insights, drawings, and charts. Mackendrick's high regard for *Citizen Kane* (1941) is evident at the conclusion of *On Film-making* in which he uses Susan Alexander Kane's attempted suicide scene to bring together all his lessons on cinematic techniques and concepts emphasizing the director– cinematographer relationship of Orson Welles and Gregg Toland which produced it. This is followed by a short epilogue concerning Mackendrick's on-the-job training and the hope his instruction contained within *On Film-making* will empower the reader with the basics of film directing. The rest, he states, is down to talent and hard work.

The lessons in *On Film-making* are both dated and timeless. The book's strength is in Mackendrick's ability to demystify. The guiding principles of filmmaking don't really change but it must be said that Mackendrick's literary and movie examples are of their time. But readers looking to make *Fight Club* (1999) or *Memento* (2000) might remember that students of drawing in Europe once had to spend hours making meticulous pencil renderings of a white napkin dropped in front of their drawing-table by their teacher. *On Film-making* is imbued with the same ethos of dedication and craftsmanship. Those who study Mackendrick's old-school approach could, with time and practice, become the next David Fincher or Christopher Nolan.

VINCENT LOBRUTTO, Editor of *CinemaEditor* magazine, teaches editing, production design, and cinema studies in the Department of Film, Video and Animation at the School of Visual Arts, New York.
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Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film

Edited by John Gibbs and Douglas Pye. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005. $74.95 cloth; $27.95 paper. 264 pages.

This anthology of new essays has bold aspirations. Originating in a conference held at the University of Reading in 2000, it argues for a reshaping of the methodologies of contemporary film studies. Amid the wide range of approaches taken by contributors, two key themes emerge: firstly, that "grounding writing about film in observable detail should be fundamental not to just one form of critical practice but to all, and not just to criticism but to theory" (5); and, secondly, "that to be concerned with film style and its significance is inevitably to be involved in interpretation" (2). For some writers, these propositions are linked to a third dictum, which is that interpretation is a process inseparable from evaluation.

The ways in which the close analysis of film style has been employed have shifted substantially over the past few decades. Its popularity within the mainstream of academic writing has, several contributors argue, been displaced by other critical methods. And yet, one might counter, if it has a lesser presence in scholarly journals than it once did, it can be found alive and well elsewhere. Featuring prominently in many studies of directors and genres, it has (in conjunction with other approaches) also proved foundational to the wellspring

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of single-film monographs that have attained popularity through such series as the BFI Film Classics and Turner Classic Movies British Film Guides (published by I. B. Tauris). Indeed it might be argued that the practice has never been more popular.

Yet while the presence of close analysis in contemporary film literature may not be in short supply, it has indubitably been disenfranchised from the province of film theory. Efforts to advance the understanding of the relationships between film style, interpretation, and evaluation have indeed been sidelined in favor of other areas of critical endeavor. In seeking to further theorize these relationships, most contributors to this volume have bypassed the relatively unself-reflective recent writings and have delved further back in time for their critical reference points. For instance, George M. Wilson's analysis of *The Scarlet Empress* (1934) offers an effective riposte to arguments made by Laura Mulvey in her enormously influential essay, "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema." Elsewhere, the British film journal, *Movie*, which launched in 1962, informs a great deal of the writing. This is hardly surprising, given that several past and present *Movie* editors—V. F. Perkins, Douglas Pye, Michael Walker, Jim Hillier, Ed Gallafent, and Deborah Thomas—have contributed to this volume.

If one purpose of this project can be seen as the reinstatement into contemporary critical practice of a form of writing most strongly associated with the 1960s, this book can in other respects be construed as very much a child of its time. This is expressed, in part, through its range of textual subjects. Whereas the first half of the book focuses on precisely the kinds of well-known Hollywood films that proved so alluring to the *Movie* writers—*Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), *Bonjour Tristesse* (1958), *Vertigo* (1958)—later chapters represent a more fashionable mixture that encompasses European art cinema (*La Cérémonie* [1995]), world cinema (*Happy Together* [1997]), avant-garde film (*Sink or Swim* [1990]) and television (*Perfect Strangers* [2001]). The inclusiveness of definitions of film style also reflects emerging critical vogues. Acting performance features prominently in the writings of several contributors including V. F. Perkins, Andrew Klevan, and Jonathan Bignell. Steve Neale focuses on another area that has been the subject of growing scholarly interest. His detailed account of the important role played by the various components of *Letter from an Unknown Woman*'s soundtrack highlights "the limitations inherent in a vocabulary dominated by visual metaphors, figures and terms—'point of view', 'viewpoint', 'view of the world', and so on" (101). Cathy Greenhalgh's meticulous and illuminating analysis of the cinematography in *Happy Together* provides an excellent illustration of the benefits of the growing interface between theoretical and practical understandings of film practice.

A further element of contemporary sensibility emerges through the sporadic bows to other methods of analysis such as audience studies. These are seen, by some writers at least, to complement the close analysis of style rather than providing a diametric alternative to it. At the same time, the editors make the book's position very clear: "we are not simply arguing for interpretation to be added to the range of approaches available within the new film studies. Rather we have wanted to suggest that an awareness of the role, significance and consequences of film style is fundamental" (13). The extent to which the relationship between style and meaning should share with other methods of analysis and the extent to which it should be elevated above (or at least separated from) them is an issue that many writers address here, be it explicitly or implicitly.

Of the more traditional analytical methods, authorship, in particular, informs several discussions. Gibbs and Pye's chapter, while focused around *Bonjour Tristesse*, also has the wider project of examining the way in which the practice of close analysis by *Movie* writers of the early 1960s participated in the construction of Otto Preminger as an auteur. Ed Gallafent's discussion of *Under Capricorn* (1949) and, to a lesser extent, Neill Potts's essay on *Vertigo* both invoke Alfred Hitchcock's use of elements of film style as a personal commentary on characters or narrative incidents. This position naturally has implications for the scope of interpretation deemed available to the viewer.

In some accounts of the relationship between film style and interpretation other methods of analysis prove pivotal. For several writers, the historical circumstances in which films are produced and consumed is an issue inseparable from the investigation of meaning and its method of generation. This position is especially evident in Corin Willis's discussion of *The Jazz Singer* (1927). Any account of meaning in this film must, he argues, inevitably contend with "a 1920s understanding of the racial difference of African-Americans" (130). As well as incorporating authorship issues, Michael Walker's account of *Liebestraum* (1991) considers the extent to which one's reading of the film may vary depending on whether it is viewed as an art film or as a genre film—a positioning that its initial release strategy failed to make clear.

In its range and scope, *Style and Meaning* purports to appeal to a readership spanning a wide range of academic experience. It will, claims the marketing blurb, "prove popular on undergraduate courses while providing an invaluable resource for graduate students and teachers of film and media." With many articles proving models of good critical practice, it certainly has considerable potential as an undergraduate textbook. Much of the writing is better suited to more advanced film scholars however, with students likely to find some chapters more accessible than others. The substantial theoretical basis of many of the essays clearly shows teaching and/or research academics to be the assumed addressees. Most of them propose "new" research methodologies: for instance Sarah Cardwell addresses the issue of "how the methodology of close textual analysis can enhance television studies" (179), while Klevan's piece explicitly recommends a teaching method.

The book is rounded off by Laura Mulvey's prediction that "new ways of consuming old movies on electronic and digital technologies should bring about a 'reinvention' of textual analysis and a new wave of cinephilia" (242). Should this practice indeed become more central to scholarly activity, be it in response to prescription and polemic or through

the more natural, reactive process that Mulvey suggests, the diligence with which this book's contributors have examined their subject will assure its place as a key text for future scholars.

DEBORAH ALLISON is a London-based cinema programmer.
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MEDIA INSTITUTIONS

The Forgotten Network: DuMont and the Birth of American Television

By David Weinstein. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2004. $59.50 cloth; $19.95 paper. 228 pages.

Television in the 1950s was a famously lucrative business for those who staked an early claim. In this vigorous first decade, a broadcast license bestowed upon a local station by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was almost literally a license to print money: advertisers paid dearly for access to an audience that multiplied day by day. The three companies that enlisted these stations into national networks—NBC, CBS, and ABC—built fortresses of profit and power from which they reigned unchallenged over the television industry for more than three decades.

And then there was the DuMont Television Network—the fabled fourth network that somehow stumbled just as the competition soared. Founded by engineer Allen B. Du Mont, whose electronics firm manufactured the country's finest television receivers during the 1940s and 50s, the company was present at the revolution, having launched a program service in 1948 from its three owned-and-operated stations in Washington, D.C., New York, and Pittsburgh. (A note: the *network* is spelled DuMont, but the *person* is Allen B. Du Mont. The difference in spelling has caused endless confusion over the years, as David Weinstein points out in his book.) DuMont's competitors had formed as radio networks and still held huge financial stakes in the radio business; they would have been foolish to promote television at the expense of radio. DuMont, on the other hand, was born a television network. With Paramount Pictures as a financial partner, DuMont claimed direct ties to the motion-picture industry and no allegiance to radio; these would seem to have offered unique advantages in the new medium. DuMont introduced viewers to the quintessence of early television—embodied in the breathtaking talent of Jackie Gleason and the gimcrack invention of *Captain Video* (1951)—and presented more than two hundred different series, along with individual news and sporting events. In spite of all this, DuMont disappeared forever from the airwaves in 1955, having failed to convince more than a handful of stations to join its network.

Time has not been kind to DuMont, which receives only a few perfunctory pages in most histories of television and has all but disappeared from popular memory. The entire life span of DuMont unfolded in the era of live broadcasting—before the introduction of videotape or the full-scale shift to filmed programs in prime time, both of which happened by the end of the decade. Like much early television, DuMont programs were broadcast live. Even if recorded in kinescopes, these programs found no place in the vast repertoire of syndicated reruns; at best a few hundred random episodes survive in the hands of collectors or in moving-image archives. The DuMont network has simply vanished into thin air. In that regard, its fate represents all that has been lost from the history of television. Thankfully, David Weinstein allows us to rediscover DuMont in the first comprehensive history, an outstanding institutional history of American television, of the network. Weinstein's accomplishment in piecing together the network's history from its few surviving traces deserves the attention of anyone interested in the history of post-war American culture and the respect of all who recognize the dedication and imagination that has gone into this research.

This book is an expedition into uncharted territory. Weinstein rediscovers people, events, and experiences that have been lost or otherwise neglected. Weinstein's unique contribution lies in his detailed understanding of the DuMont network: its administrative organization and programming strategies, its conception of the television audience and necessarily low-budget production practices. He has explored several manuscript collections, including those of Allen B. Du Mont and the DuMont Laboratories, which are held at the Library of Congress and the National Museum of American History, and has tracked down and viewed the existing programs, many of which survive in kinescopes at the UCLA Film and Television Archives. With the aid of excellent photographs discovered in the archives, Weinstein revives the key DuMont programs and reconstructs the conditions of their production. He describes the programs that filled the airwaves and the personalities who achieved early fame on the network (including Dennis James, Morey Amsterdam, Gleason, and Bishop Fulton J. Sheen) with a degree of detail that is rare. Under the circumstances, his account serves as our best—and certainly most widely accessible—record of many of these experimental early television programs.

Each DuMont program was a laboratory for working through several challenges facing a television network with no prior experience in broadcasting: how to build a comprehensive schedule using live, low-cost programs in order to capture the attention of viewers whose preferences and viewing habits were largely unknown. The space adventure, *Captain Video*, displayed a typically inventive solution to these challenges. In each episode, during dramatic scenes performed live on a futuristic spaceship set, Captain Video would pause to check his video screen, through which he (and the home viewer) monitored the progress of his various "agents." These extended scenes consisted of film clips salvaged from B-movies and serials—not from science-fiction movies, as one might expect, but from Westerns. For reasons that made absolutely no narrative sense, the Captain's agents were earthbound cowboys. Producer James Caddigan explained this abrupt shift in genres in delightfully pragmatic terms: "the western is there to give us the pace and action that we can't get in a live studio production" (74).

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Weinstein also brings a new dimension to our understanding of the political and financial battles that made it impossible to establish a successful fourth network in the United States until Fox emerged in the 1980s. Why did DuMont fail? The answer, in broad outline, is known from previous research, but Weinstein adds perspective by sketching the character of Du Mont, who was at heart an engineer—not a showman, nor even broadcaster. He fought fiercely to improve television's technical standards (often in opposition to the powerful lobbying efforts of RCA), but "had little interest in fundamental aspects of postwar network broadcasting, such as production techniques, aesthetics, scheduling, or advertising sales . . . If Du Mont watched TV, it was mostly to study reception and other technical matters" (5). This is hardly the profile of a visionary network leader. One can only admire the conviction that enabled Allen Du Mont to challenge RCA and Westinghouse, yet his quest for independence from these titans of the electronics industry led him into an ill-fated partnership with Paramount, which may have provided a crucial investment in 1938, but thereafter hampered nearly every attempt to fortify or to expand the DuMont network. The FCC's early channel allocation policies—in which very few cities had more than three available channels and most had only two—created a situation in which only three television networks were likely to survive. The dominant radio networks, NBC and CBS, signed affiliates in most markets, leaving the challengers, DuMont and ABC, to scrap over the stations that remained. Why did ABC survive and DuMont collapse?

The answer can be traced back to the Supreme Court's 1948 *Paramount* decision, which determined the eventual structure of the emerging television industry, just as it would the post-war movie industry. On the final day of 1949, following the government mandate, Paramount dissolved into two separate companies: the studio, Paramount Pictures, and the divested theater chain, United Paramount Theaters. It was DuMont's grave misfortune to be allied with the studio and not with the theater chain. United Paramount Theaters eventually purchased ABC and poured its resources into a project of expansion, vastly improving the quality of its programs and its value to affiliates. Paramount Pictures, in contrast, was satisfied to "buy and hold" its investment in DuMont. Due to the terms of the investment, Paramount held veto power over nearly any corporate decision, yet lacked incentives for advancing the network's cause. As his rivals grew, Du Mont faced a critical dilemma: "retain a partner that did not help with financing, but basically let him run the company as he wanted; or take another partner that might have improved DuMont's operations in network broadcasting, but also might have pushed Allen Du Mont and his colleagues out of key management positions" (34). In making the safe choice to stay with Paramount, Du Mont lost a network.

CHRISTOPHER ANDERSON teaches in the Department of Communication and Culture at Indiana University and is the author of *Hollywood TV: The Studio System in the Fifties* (University of Texas Press, 1994).

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Hollywood and the Culture Elite: How the Movies Became American

By Peter DeCherney. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. $29.00 paper. 269 pages.

Museum Movies: The Museum of Modern Art and the Birth of Art Cinema

By Haidee Wasson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. $60.00 cloth; $24.95 paper. 314 pages.

Iris Barry, founder and long-time curator of the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) Film Library (now the Department of Film and Media), emerges from these two books (which rely on an immense archive of her personal correspondence, reports, internal memoranda, and meeting notes) as a monumental figure in the history of American, even international understanding of film as a legitimate art form. Barry was a Renaissance woman for whom the cinema could be comfortably both art for the elite and entertainment for the masses. She was born and spent much of her adulthood in England and, like H.D., Virginia Woolf, and other literary women of her generation, she found in the cinema an institution which served many purposes: its aesthetic was manifestly modernist, its populist appeal was subversive of the elite Victorian culture she rejected, and film as a medium seemed to offer a secret psychic route of escape for women caught in the straitjacket of contemporary gender expectations.

Barry was a constant presence in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theatre, the screening room in the bowels of the Museum's 53rd Street edifice. She had a permanent reserved seat with a house phone, a direct connection to the projection booth, next to it. When audiences behaved badly, chiefly by laughing too obstreperously at silent comedies, Barry used her phone to alert the projectionist to turn on a slide projector she had had installed for just this reason; the slide it flashed read, "If the disturbance in the auditorium does not cease, the showing of this film will be discontinued." Barry sometimes made good on that threat. Screenings were canceled as quickly as ten minutes into the program. Barry's rebuke to noisy museumgoers is evidence of the complexity of the Film Library's negotiation between high and low culture, which these complementary books explore.

Haidee Wasson covers the founding of the Film Library and the formative years of 1935–39, during which the Film Library's mission underwent the most overt self-analysis. Peter DeCherney takes the story deep into the Cold War, when MOMA and the Film Library morphed from an institution which described and catalogued American modernism, to one which joined the service of political nationalism. In Wasson's book, the Film Library dramatically invents and reinvents itself in its first years; in DeCherney's, it slowly succumbs, over the decades, to an institutional poison cocktail of corporate patronage, government contracts, the Hollywood film industry, and the anti-Communist hysteria in the culture at large.

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DeCherney and Wasson show that the Film Library's archival and programming policies made it a workshop for national cultural identity. Of exceptional value here is the sheer variety of ways film collecting and programming could be used in the service of arguments about American national character; we see Barry and her staff constantly revising these arguments, in one of the most unusual rhetorical projects in film history. In essence, Barry and the Museum sought new ways to articulate the claim that the motion picture was an original American art form and a sociological tool to assess the American character. DeCherney's determinist account is at its best when he describes the shift from a pre-war, Romantic nationalist vision of what film could do, to a Cold War realist view of what film must do. For Wasson, the most important part of the story ends in 1939, as the Film Library moves out of its preparadigmatic state and into a prosperous but ethically uncertain wartime future, an icon of the Big Culture it had helped to create.

The Film Library borrowed elements from several of the most significant film tastemaking institutions of the twentieth century, among them the Library of Congress, Harvard and Columbia universities, and the American Museum of Natural History. From multiple sources in elite and museum culture, MOMA's nascent film programs took from an extensive menu of possibilities. As a chapter in the history of what we longingly call our "discipline," Wasson and DeCherney show how beholden film studies are to the sorts of patronage that belie our claim to cultural populism. This is especially ironic given that, as Wasson shows, the MOMA film programs were part of a wider project of canonizing the modern and of the "larger museological shift" (19) which took place in the 1930s, as many art museums re-envisioned themselves as democratic rather than elitist.

Barry and the Film Library were never ideologically neutral in the culture wars that swirled around them. Rather, the cultural mission the Film Library sought to fulfill shifted continually during its first years, and thereafter as MOMA film programs began to succeed in legitimizing film in the American public sphere. Among other things, Barry, shows DeCherney, proved to be a determined Cold Warrior. He sees the Film Library's turn away from experimental cinema during the World War II years and after as allied to the host museum's darker cooperation with the CIA in seeking to establish American cultural hegemony abroad. For DeCherney, this is not a matter of opportunistic funding politics, but destiny; his work is a frequently profound ethical query into the costs of patronage. DeCherney argues emphatically that the Film Library could not be separated from the corporate and nationalist impulses that had spawned it.

Both Wasson and DeCherney show how Hollywood sought to become an agency for the transmission of a middlebrow position on culture partially through the instrument of the Film Library. Arising at the very instant of middlebrow's prominence on the American cultural scene, and powered by a politically astute founder, the Film Library quickly became an essential conduit for this position. As DeCherney puts it, "Cultural institutions [such as the Film Library] proved to be a crucial force in the process of making Hollywood into a monolithic industry of national culture" (206). Key figures in the Hollywood film industry saw the Film Library as an avenue for cultural respectability for their art form. This was an impression Barry and her MOMA associate, John Abbott, adroitly curried.

And yet, as Wasson in particular points out, MOMA's film programming and other activities overflowed the middlebrow paradigm, creating a unique cultural space between the popular and the self-consciously aesthetic. In the Film Library's early programming, the populism of historical Hollywood cinema fought with the anti-populism of the experimental works the Film Library also championed. Wasson shows that no easy theory of commodification can reconcile these two impulses and that the museum remained a politically useful site of cultural contestation. For Wasson, the Film Library's history cannot be reduced to an uncomplicated exercise in hegemony. Speaking of the Film Library's pioneering attempt to offer the consumption of popular culture in a high-art setting, she writes: "This was not an ideologically benign nor a simple impulse. It was tied both to class-inflected projects to reform cinemagoers deemed ignorant or dangerous and to alternative models for cinema that sought to integrate movie watching with organized modes of cultural engagement that might be critical not just of industry but also of middlebrow and religious moralizing" (18).

Regardless of the Film Library's changing mission, it did what it said it set out to do: it brought film as an art form to the masses. (At one point, the Museum had 1800 admissions a day, the film screenings 500.) Not only New York's masses, but, through Barry's circulating film library, untold audiences around the nation benefited from exposure to Barry's energetic curatorial philosophy. This project may have been (it is in DeCherney's reading) an ideologically complicit one, but it was also meaningful in the lives of that audience. One of the melancholy joys of reading these two books is that of wondering whether what we do in film studies will ever matter in these ways again.

KEVIN HAGOPIAN is Senior Lecturer in Media Studies at Penn State University, where he teaches courses in film history and theory.
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New Media and Popular Imagination: Launching Radio, Television, and Digital Media in the United States

By William Boddy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, $129.95, cloth; $35.00 paper. 172 pages.

Media historiography tends to understand technological change as a process of industrial absorption and restablization, demonstrating how emerging technologies are integrated into existing production and consumption practices. William Boddy takes a very different position. In expanding the scope of analysis beyond industry, Boddy argues against

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"traditional historiographic metanarratives of technological progress and commercial mastery," suggesting instead that the emergence of new communications technologies are "moments of genuine uncertainty and improvisation, where the prospect of destabilizing technological innovation serves to throw into relief prevailing industry models, regulatory rationales and consumer practices" (3). While media histories, including Ramond Williams's *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (1974; Routledge, 2003), Lynn Spigel's *Make Room for TV* (University of Chicago Press, 1992), and Boddy's pervious book *Fifties Television* (University of Illinois Press, 1990), have regularly looked to disruptions and discursive negotiations new technologies have provoked, this historiographic straw man of "metanarrative of technological progress" nevertheless provides a clear opposition from which to establish his approach. Although Boddy's approach is not as unique or disruptive as much of the introduction claims and its references to foregoing books are scant, the eight case studies of *New Media and Popular Imagination* offer a persuasive addition to the growing historical examination of industrial and political adoption of media technologies within broader social, domestic, and national contexts.

Boddy's historical analysis is innovative to the extent that it consciously uses history as a means of understanding and intervening in present debates surrounding the emergence of a host of digital media (digital broadcasting, DVRs, virtual advertising, internet television, etc.), whereas television histories such as Spigel's *Make Room for TV* are rather narrowly focused historical accounts of a specific medium and context. The book is organized around a series of thematically linked, but historically discontinuous, case studies of the promotion of new media technologies for the twentieth-century home.

The first section is comprised of three historical analyses, examining the emergence and solidification of cinema, radio, and broadcast television as commercial media. These chapters lay out the historical framework for the more contemporary case studies to follow, but also offer a few points of historical revision of their own. For example, the first chapter connects the histories of cinema and wireless. Rather than treating these two late nineteenth-century media as distinct, Boddy argues that industrial and popular responses to them were marked by a common set of cultural "anxieties" and "ambitions." The opening section of *New Media and Popular Imagination* thus establishes historical "themes" relating to the role of electronic media in mediating public and private space, in accommodating the gendered routines of domestic life, in constructing a sense of national identity, and throwing into relief previously established economic models, institutions, program forms, and audience practices.

The importance of Boddy's book lies in its ability to connect these historical themes to current debates surrounding the emergence of digital communications technologies. While each new technology, of course, provokes new anxieties and hopes, Boddy shows that there are striking continuities over time. Indeed, "the long history of popular culture's alternately fearful and euphoric representations of electronic communication in the home suggests the continuing historical relevance of such ephemeral fantasies of pleasure and terror" (4). Having established his set of cultural anxieties and ambitions, Boddy then turns to similar issues articulated by the emergence of digital communication technologies over the past fifteen years. Boddy's case studies on digital technology demonstrate how the "anticipatory" and "contested" discourses surrounding the emergence of radio and broadcast television are historically reoccurring and the extent to which these previous debates can shed new light on the discourses surrounding developing business models, media policy, and concepts of audiences provoked by the digital landrush of the 1990s.

The remaining case studies, which mostly trace the transformations digital technology has wrought on practices in television, are organized more or less chronologically and offer a general, if discontinuous, history of the development of industrial, governmental, and popular responses to emerging digital technologies. More than simply illuminating the context of technological innovation, however, the debates and dialogues form, according to Boddy, the basis for industrial decision-making and policy implementation. Understanding the "power of ideas," then, returns a sense of "historical agency to the social and political determinations inflecting the commercial exploitation of new media technologies" (3). In this sense, the process of innovation in electronic communications technologies can be understood through an analysis of how they are "imagined" within the diverse historical sites Boddy takes as evidence, such as institutional self-representation, popular fiction and film, the trade and popular presses, and the legislative record.

Boddy begins with the crisis of nationalism brought on by the blurred national lines of media ownership and by a period of growth in American market power internationally. This crisis was furthered by the multichannel media environment, which forced a reconceptualization of the domestic viewer. But if digital technologies gave rise to traditional notions of television as a signifier of nationalism and viewers as passive and feminine, the discourse surrounding the marketing of digital technology makes claim to solving such crises. The utopian possibilities of digital innovation were, of course, inflected with their own ideological assumptions, however. For example, while the possibilities of interactivity offered domestic television a "second chance," according to media pundits like George Gilder and promotional discourses for such new technologies, the fantasies of mastery offered by these discourses tended to replace the feminized, "passive" television apparatus with an "active," masculinized apparatus that offered interactive televisual consumption not only as a desirable commodity but also as a solution to the social crisis of masculinity at the time. For Boddy, examples such as these suggest that technological innovation is always about more than promotion and market control; new technologies are always embedded in the social, "illuminat[ing] the wider ideological and psychic contexts for media reception" (165).

For the broadcast industries in the 1990s, however, digital technologies often created an atmosphere of disorder and

degeneration. Boddy's case studies on the Digital Video Recorder (DVR) and virtual advertising suggest the way previous industrial models, textual forms, and audience behaviour were thrown into relief by emerging technologies. However, Boddy makes the point that it was not actual technological adoption by consumers, but the capacity and possibility of the effects of such an innovation that evoked the broadcast industries to rethink traditional assumptions. "The mere threat of the DVR has already encouraged a range of new technological and advertising countermeasures to the digital recorder's ability to evade standard TV commercials" (135). But the outcome of these transformations, including their implications for media scholarship, is still undecided. In particular, as regards intellectual property, developments in the regulation of digital technology will have "a direct effect on how film and television teachers and researchers might accomplish their work" (153). Concluding on a note of great practical relevance to teachers and researchers, *New Media and Popular Imagination* is, though brief, one of the most comprehensive accounts of recent upheavals in media technology. Boddy's comparative historical analysis of media change offers deep insight into contemporary transformations. This book gives historical precedence to our current state of media-industry upheaval and disorientation, and makes every industrial and political decision, no matter how insignificant or distant, direct and personal.

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THEORIES AND TOPICS

Action Speaks Louder: Violence, Spectacle, and the American Action Movie

By Eric Lichtenfeld. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004. $39.95 cloth. 336 pages.

Eric Lichtenfeld's *Action Speaks Louder* nicely fills a gap in the sparse literature on the often-maligned Hollywood action genre. Given the unavoidable limitations Lichtenfeld faced when writing a genre study covering more than three decades of filmmaking, virtually all readers will disagree with some of the choices he was forced to make. Lichtenfeld's careful formal analysis of a wide variety of films and his energetic writing style, however, make the book not only a valuable contribution to the field but also a pleasurable read. Readers interested in the action genre generally, those interested in representations of masculinity and violence specifically, as well as those interested in Hollywood's use of special effects will find Lichtenfeld's book useful.

The book is organized along a rough chronological scheme. Before proceeding to consider *Dirty Harry*, Lichtenfeld's archetypal action film, he considers carefully three other films from 1971: *Billy Jack*, *Shaft,* and *The French Connection*. In the chapter devoted to the 1970s, Lichtenfeld presents his understanding of the action-film formula. His discussion of the 1980s begins with a consideration of Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger and their respective bodies (and bodies of work). He also discusses the stars from this era responsible for introducing martial arts to the genre: Chuck Norris, Steven Seagal, and Jean-Claude Van Damme. Turning to the 1990s, Lichtenfeld begins with the Bruce Willis vehicle *Die Hard* (1988), identifying it as the seminal film for the turn to spectacular effects as much as spectacular bodies. The concluding chapters of the book are organized thematically. Lichtenfeld devotes attention to the contemporary disaster film, the marriage of action and science fiction, and movies depicting comic-book superheroes. In the book's conclusion, Lichtenfeld offers a thought-provoking summary of his argument and the questions raised by this body of cinematic work.

Throughout the book, Lichtenfeld's primary tool for analysis is formal description of the films in question. The detail and care with which he describes the formal elements of the films is undeniably the book's best feature. In addition to these detailed formal analyses, Lichtenfeld also does a nice job of describing the historical context under which the films arose. This is especially true in his discussion of the films from the 1970s and 80s. Because it is often harder to understand one's own immediate context, it is understandable that the description of historical and political realities in the 1990s is less rich. Finally, Lichtenfeld sometimes refers to production notes for the films as well as popular press accounts. Although Richard Slotkin's foreword and Lichtenfeld's introduction claim that the book balances formal analysis and production history, the weight of the book is definitely on the former. For readers interested in detailed production information about these films, Lichtenfeld's book is not the best source. Similarly, the reception history is also fairly superficial, usually limited to comments from the trade press. While Lichtenfeld references Yvonne Tasker's work when discussing the Stallone and Schwarzenegger films, and Richard Slotkin's work when discussing the Western mythos that fuels action films, *Action Speaks Louder* barely engages with the theoretical literature on action films, masculinity, or cinematic violence.

Lichtenfeld contends that the action film is concerned with a warrior hero who operates outside legitimate systems of power (even if he happens to be a cop or a soldier) and who is interested not in merely subduing, but in subjugating and annihilating a force of disorder. This warrior hero has a signature weapon and is generally motivated by a spirit of vengeance or vigilantism. Although he always triumphs in the end, he must often undergo great physical trials and corporeal punishment to achieve his goal. In the 1980s, the single greatest innovation was the warrior hero's spectacular, virtu-

degeneration. Boddy's case studies on the Digital Video Recorder (DVR) and virtual advertising suggest the way previous industrial models, textual forms, and audience behaviour were thrown into relief by emerging technologies. However, Boddy makes the point that it was not actual technological adoption by consumers, but the capacity and possibility of the effects of such an innovation that evoked the broadcast industries to rethink traditional assumptions. "The mere threat of the DVR has already encouraged a range of new technological and advertising countermeasures to the digital recorder's ability to evade standard TV commercials" (135). But the outcome of these transformations, including their implications for media scholarship, is still undecided. In particular, as regards intellectual property, developments in the regulation of digital technology will have "a direct effect on how film and television teachers and researchers might accomplish their work" (153). Concluding on a note of great practical relevance to teachers and researchers, *New Media and Popular Imagination* is, though brief, one of the most comprehensive accounts of recent upheavals in media technology. Boddy's comparative historical analysis of media change offers deep insight into contemporary transformations. This book gives historical precedence to our current state of media-industry upheaval and disorientation, and makes every industrial and political decision, no matter how insignificant or distant, direct and personal.

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THEORIES AND TOPICS

Action Speaks Louder: Violence, Spectacle, and the American Action Movie

By Eric Lichtenfeld. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004. $39.95 cloth. 336 pages.

Eric Lichtenfeld's *Action Speaks Louder* nicely fills a gap in the sparse literature on the often-maligned Hollywood action genre. Given the unavoidable limitations Lichtenfeld faced when writing a genre study covering more than three decades of filmmaking, virtually all readers will disagree with some of the choices he was forced to make. Lichtenfeld's careful formal analysis of a wide variety of films and his energetic writing style, however, make the book not only a valuable contribution to the field but also a pleasurable read. Readers interested in the action genre generally, those interested in representations of masculinity and violence specifically, as well as those interested in Hollywood's use of special effects will find Lichtenfeld's book useful.

The book is organized along a rough chronological scheme. Before proceeding to consider *Dirty Harry*, Lichtenfeld's archetypal action film, he considers carefully three other films from 1971: *Billy Jack*, *Shaft,* and *The French Connection*. In the chapter devoted to the 1970s, Lichtenfeld presents his understanding of the action-film formula. His discussion of the 1980s begins with a consideration of Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger and their respective bodies (and bodies of work). He also discusses the stars from this era responsible for introducing martial arts to the genre: Chuck Norris, Steven Seagal, and Jean-Claude Van Damme. Turning to the 1990s, Lichtenfeld begins with the Bruce Willis vehicle *Die Hard* (1988), identifying it as the seminal film for the turn to spectacular effects as much as spectacular bodies. The concluding chapters of the book are organized thematically. Lichtenfeld devotes attention to the contemporary disaster film, the marriage of action and science fiction, and movies depicting comic-book superheroes. In the book's conclusion, Lichtenfeld offers a thought-provoking summary of his argument and the questions raised by this body of cinematic work.

Throughout the book, Lichtenfeld's primary tool for analysis is formal description of the films in question. The detail and care with which he describes the formal elements of the films is undeniably the book's best feature. In addition to these detailed formal analyses, Lichtenfeld also does a nice job of describing the historical context under which the films arose. This is especially true in his discussion of the films from the 1970s and 80s. Because it is often harder to understand one's own immediate context, it is understandable that the description of historical and political realities in the 1990s is less rich. Finally, Lichtenfeld sometimes refers to production notes for the films as well as popular press accounts. Although Richard Slotkin's foreword and Lichtenfeld's introduction claim that the book balances formal analysis and production history, the weight of the book is definitely on the former. For readers interested in detailed production information about these films, Lichtenfeld's book is not the best source. Similarly, the reception history is also fairly superficial, usually limited to comments from the trade press. While Lichtenfeld references Yvonne Tasker's work when discussing the Stallone and Schwarzenegger films, and Richard Slotkin's work when discussing the Western mythos that fuels action films, *Action Speaks Louder* barely engages with the theoretical literature on action films, masculinity, or cinematic violence.

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ally superhuman physique. In the 1990s, with the advent of facilitating technologies, the body of the warrior hero became less important than explosions and other special effects. Lichtenfeld describes this shift as a decline from the more complex character portraits and moral inquiries of earlier films. This is one place where greater theoretical sophistication from Lichtenfeld would have been helpful. Do spectacular effects necessarily detract from the human element of a film or do they instead offer a different set of pleasures to the audience? Is it possible that audiences raised on rapid-cut television advertising and music videos are better able to find the human dimension amid the special-effects wizardry? Is technology the only reason that the warrior hero has a different corporeality, or are there cultural reasons that audiences of the 1990s can accept a more feminized or homoeroticized champion?

A similar point could be made about one of Lichtenfeld's most intriguing insights about the generic lineage of the action film. Near the beginning of the book, when discussing the generic precursors to the action film, Lichtenfeld makes the obvious connection to the Western. He also makes the more unusual claim that the action film carries forward the male anxiety inherent in film noir. Appealing to both the formal and narrative elements of many of the films from the 1970s and 80s, Lichtenfeld makes a persuasive case for this connection. By the time he gets to the 1990s, however, he seems to have forgotten this insight or at least feels no compulsion to explain why the films of the 90s are not anxious or are not representing anxiety according to the same codes.

The most notable omission in the book is any discussion of female action stars. Although Lichtenfeld notes that he chose not to focus on issues of gender and race, because these are the questions that have been given fullest treatment in existing discussions of the action genre, the virtual elimination of films featuring female characters—especially *The Terminator* (1984), *Terminator 2* (1991), and *Aliens* (1986)—borders on indefensible. Conversely, Lichtenfeld's most evocative discussion comes in the chapter where he compares the POW/MIA subgenre with the apocalyptic subgenre. According to Lichtenfeld's reading, both of these subgenres have to do with re-remembering the past, with the latter using a reremembered version of a fictional past to critique the historic present and provide a utopic vision of the future. Lichtenfeld's discussion of *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) to make this point is surely one of the richest considerations of that film.

KENT L. BRINTNALL is a doctoral candidate in the Graduate Division of Religion at Emory University. His work focuses on contemporary visual culture, Christian theological discourses, and their respective depictions of the suffering male body.

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The Dark Creative Passage: A Derridean Journey from The Literary Text to Film

By Roberta Imboden. Trier: WVT, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier: 2005. $19.00 paper. 166 pages.

The Dark Creative Passage aims to illuminate the "creative process," which Imboden likens to travelling a "dark passage," that occurs when transforming a literary text into film. The passage is dark because it involves a blindness or an invisibility. The notion that the creative process involves invisibility is adapted from Derrida's discussion of this idea—in relation to blindness, memory, and (re)presentation—in his book *Memoirs of the Blind* (1993), which Imboden briefly outlines in chapter 1, "A Derridean Guide for the Road Map." Of the many philosophers, poets, and drawings through which Derrida discusses (in)visibility, memory and (re)presentation, Imboden chooses four to guide not only her own interpretations of books and films, but also her descriptions of creativity and adaptation.

The first of these guides is the story (and picture) of Butades, a young woman who turns away from her lover in order to draw the outline of his shadow on the wall. The second is the self-portrait of Henri Fantin-Latour, who is invisible to himself in the moment his hand and eye fall on paper. The third is St. Paul, blinded by the light of God on the road to Damascus. Finally, there is a love letter written in pitch dark by Diderot. In Derrida's discussion of these four figures (among many others), what is emphasized is that they all involve a turning-away from (thus making invisible) the object they aim to represent. For example, Fantin-Latour turns away from his reflection in the mirror and Derrida argues that he has to commit his own image to memory in order to draw himself. What is (re)presented, however, is not a perfect copy (mimesis), but something that is simultaneously the same and different. For Derrida, the invisible moment that occurs when turning away from an original in order to represent it in drawing or writing always inhabits the visible. Invisibility inhabits the visible. Thus, in Derrida's account, what is visible depends on an invisible moment (what we do not see), when we attempt to represent something.

Imboden argues that Derrida's notion of (in)visibility applies when a filmmaker turns away from a literary text in order to represent it through the medium of film. In so doing, she opens up other "creative passages" through subtle comparisons between the works she discusses. These include: Sei Shonagon's and Peter Greenaway's *The Pillow Book* (1996), St. Mark's Gospel and Denys Arcand's *Jesus of Montreal* (1989), Dashiell Hammett's and John Huston's *Maltese Falcon* (1941) and Quentin Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* (1994), Michael Ondaatje's and Anthony Minghella's *The English Patient* (1996), Marguerite Duras's and Jean-Jacques Annaud's *The Lover* (1992), William Blake's *The Songs of Inocence and Experience* and Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* (1995). A chapter is

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devoted to each adaptation, with Imboden discussing first the source text then the film.

Imboden states in her introduction that her book is not a psychological approach to the phenomenon of creative process, but neither is it film theory, traditional literary theory, or philosophical analysis. Derrida's ideas are not therefore situated in relation to the history of aesthetic philosophy; his work is used "not to create a theory, but simply to explore the process that occurs between the two texts" (9). What ensues instead is an interpretation that explores the relevance of the notion of (in)visibility in relation to literary or filmic narrative. Imboden's discussion is beautifully and quasi-poetically written and also interesting and insightful. However, her interpretation of the texts and the creative passage between a book and film led me to think that her application of the notion of (in)visibility would have benefited from some more attention to film theory and analysis. Reading *The Dark Creative Passage*, I often thought that one way of understanding how the (invisible) creative process is *manifested* in film, might be to start by analyzing the cinematic form, the relationship of cinematic devices (close-ups, long shots, objective and subjective POV, color, mise-en-scène) to plot, narrative, and themes, as well as to the descriptions of characters and various tropes and metaphors in a literary text, so opening up questions of interpretation and (re)presentation. I would have liked to see Imboden delve more into the ways in which the literary medium itself becomes invisible as it is shaped into the significantly different medium of film. Such an exploration might have demonstrated not only how the filmmaker relies on memory and imagination (and therefore invisibility) in order to represent the literary text as film, but also how the different mediums convey (in)visibility in differing ways.

To demonstrate the ways in which the various cinematic devices are employed differently in every film, would convey more powerfully (and in keeping with Derrida) how (in)visibility, and thus creativity, is not an homogenous process. Invisibility is never singular. There are always and already layers of invisibility that haunt visibility and vice versa. There are always different cultural, social, political, ethical, ethnic, gendered, classed ways of seeing and, given this, there are always different visibilities. It must be said, however, that Imboden states clearly that theoretical analysis is not the purpose of the book. Rather, Imboden seeks through her "use of a poetic manner of writing that attempts to blur the boundary between artistic text and critical text" (4) to actually perform the creative process itself. Her poetic discussions of literary and film texts creates a new text, which is itself creative and, ultimately, a performative application of Derrida's notion of (in)visibility.

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Encyclopedia of the Documentary Film

Edited by Ian Aitken. New York: Routledge, 2006. $625.00 cloth. 3 volumes, 1968 pages.

The enthusiastic reception accorded *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), *March of the Penguins* (2005), *My Architect* (2003), and *Spellbound* (2002), to name but four recent documentary films that have enjoyed both critical recognition and financial success, has done much to vanquish the long prevalent myth that general audiences are not interested in nonfiction film. Within academic film studies, the proliferation of scholarship on documentary cinema, once a quasi-taboo subject when film semiotics were dismantling realism during the 1970s and 80s, is equally striking. Add in the current popularity of reality television, the "mocumentary," and Internet webcam sites and the assertion that documentary modes (or at least their appearance) lie at the heart of much contemporary media culture seems indisputable, if hardly better understood, for all of their alleged ubiquity.

Covering a geographically vast tradition in film practice and theory as old as the cinematic medium itself, the *Encyclopedia of Documentary Film*, edited by Ian Aitken with contributions by 242 scholars and film practitioners, is destined to be a major resource for scholars, students, and filmmakers. Writing of its mission in the introduction, Aitken asserts: "This encyclopedia provides a much-needed infrastructural support for the field of documentary film studies, and the material that it contains should provide the basis for many future research projects. The encyclopedia also enables the field to be considered, and even eventually theorized, as a totality. It is now, and for the first time, possible to make comparative studies of different national and regional documentary film traditions, and to create an overall 'map' of the field. This will prove an invaluable aid to future research" (xxxviii). On the whole, the book lives up to these strong claims and manifests a commendable ambition and spirit of inclusivity. Its entries are generally well-written, factually accurate, and often models of intellectual concision.

Comprising essays on individual films, filmmakers, film theorists, organizations, geographic regions, concepts, styles, and themes, the *Encyclopedia* is unique among film reference books for its international focus and conceptual generosity. From the earliest films of the Lumière brothers and silent newsreels, to contemporary efforts by directors such as Patricio Guzman and Ross McElwee, the historical range of this book is admirable. Alphabetical and thematic lists of entries and a meticulous index precede and conclude all three volumes and make them easy to navigate. Readers seeking information on canonical figures such as Robert Flaherty, John Grierson, Jean Rouch, and Dziga Vertov will find it in abundance. Moving between biographical, film, organizational, and national entries allows a topic to emerge in different contexts, a process facilitated by useful cross-references at the conclusion of many entries. This is especially evident in the treatment of 1930s British documentary, not surprisingly one of the book's strengths given Aitken's own research interests,

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and the infrastructure created by the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board, the Crown Film Unit, the Empire Marketing Board (through Stephen Tallents), and the General Post Office Film Unit receives particularly thorough coverage.

Yet for every entry on a well-known film, practitioner, or movement, the *Encylopedia* contains many more on topics far less familiar. These include documentary film in Greece, Japan, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Switzerland, in addition to thirty-eight other geographical entries, and treat a dazzling range of national filmmaking traditions. Coverage of German films and filmmakers is especially complete. The comparative multinational focus of the articles on documentary in relation to the major wars of the twentieth century should prove especially useful to historians. With nearly 200 entries on filmmakers and almost as many on individual films, the *Encyclopedia* cultivates an admirable willingness to stray beyond the canonical, and only its most jaded readers will come away not curious to see works by Jon Bang Carlsen, Roman Kroiter, Kim Longinotto, Atavazd Pelechian, Anne Claire Poirier, or the dozens of other filmmakers and film titles they likely will encounter, as I did, for the first time.

Another significant contribution of the *Encyclopedia* is its inclusion of film theories, theorists, and concepts, a welcome integration of the intellectual history and philosophical underpinnings of documentary into its definition. Along with the usual suspects in classical film theory, André Bazin, Bela Balazs, and Siegfried Kracauer, contemporary scholars such as Bill Nichols and Michael Renov receive entries. So do Akira Iwasaki, Ricciotto Canudo, and Jean-Louis Comolli but not, surprisingly, Brian Winston. Aitken contributes illuminating articles on Grierson and the philosophy of realism, rounding out the book as a valuable overview of film theoretical thinking on documentary. Entries on digitalization, computer animation, indexicality, multimedia, and interactivity acknowledge the significance of new media technologies to documentary practice and theory, although more coverage of production techniques would have been helpful.

A range of synthetic articles on deconstruction, globalization, Hitler, homosexuality, and human rights propose new directions for research and by recasting the study of documentary in fresh analytic and methodological categories they comprise some of the most rewarding entries in the book. More essays in this vein, on topics such as the relation of documentary to visual culture, psychoanalysis, urbanization, and pornography, would have broadened the *Encyclopedia* even further and increased its interdisciplinary scope. For useful as the book's dominant organizational categories —film, director, and national cinema—remain, their underlying conceptualization is at odds with tendencies in contemporary media and cultural studies to question precisely such unities.

It is inevitable that a book of this scale should contain blind spots. But some are disconcerting and suggest capriciousness. China and India, two of the world's most populous nations with thriving media industries, receive no entries of their own. Africa is more present but still undercovered. John Schlesinger, maker of one documentary film, has an entry, but not Michelangelo Antonioni, maker of many. Avant-garde films such as Andy Warhol's *Chelsea Girls* (1966) and Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie's *Pull My Daisy* (1959) are admitted into the documentary stable, but why not Bruce Conner's *Report* (1967) or Michael Snow's *La Région centrale* (1971)? Rick Prelinger, pre-eminent archivist of the American industrial film, is never mentioned. Neither are French documentarist Pierre Chenal and French American documentary and studio director Robert Florey. Reflections on the history of documentary film expounded in books by William Stott, Paul Rotha, and Erik Barnouw and more general considerations of historiographical issues are absent as well.

Tellingly, the United Kingdom receives a comprehensive overview essay but not the United States, and the social and political institutions which produced the documentary aesthetic of the New Deal receive far less attention than their British counterparts. Documentary practices in communist Russia and fascist Italy, Spain, and Germany are analyzed at length throughout the *Encyclopedia* but apart from a valuable essay on publicity and public relations the role of documentary films in liberal capitalist societies, probably the context in which most were produced in the twentieth century, is slighted. To be fair, many entries do recognize the function of documentaries in social democracies but none explores it with the requisite detail so as to theorize liberal capitalism as itself a distinctive political and sociocultural environment for nonfiction filmmaking. Similarly, the relation of documentary film to other modes of cultural expression—literature, painting, architecture, theater, philosophy, and most surprisingly, photography—surfaces in the occasional entry (such as those on Paul Strand or Humphrey Jennings) without confirming the central role these media played in conceptions of documentary realism prevalent in Weimar Germany, Soviet Russia, New Deal America, or 1960s Europe. Figures such as Georg Lukács, Alexander Rodchenko, Otto Dix, John Steinbeck, and Guy Debord also contributed to differing conceptions of what constitutes documentary practice, even if, with the exception of Debord, they were not themselves filmmakers.

It must fall to another book to illuminate such connections, and by emphasizing the trees over the forest, the individual film or director over the broad cultural context, this *Encyclopedia* nonetheless makes an invaluable contribution. The network of contributors and overall schema that Aitken has assembled, clearly the product of many years of dedicated labor, could well support further scholarship on the generally high level that is here in evidence. Whether in the form of additional volumes or digital web-based supplements, this cosmopolitan publishing project deserves to grow and evolve as much as the challenging cinema to which it constitutes a fitting tribute.

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